

My Trivial Life and Misfortune

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MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND MISFORTUNE

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BY

A PLAIN WOMAN

A GOSSIP WITH NO PLOT IN PARTICULAR

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND MISFORTUNE.

Book II

CHAPTER I.

"It is nearly three months since her death, and there is Sophy——" began Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart.

"It was three months yesterday," remarked my aunt, "for Snipkins said so.

"Then it is more than three months since her death, and there is Sophy still giving way in that selfish manner. She could be quite cheerful if she would only make the effort. We all know, Mrs Sherbrook, that young people do not feel as we do."

"No indeed, Catherine," exclaimed Aunt Jane. "I did not allow a bell to be rung that first week, and I never ceased crying; while Sophy did not shed a tear until after the funeral. And, Catherine,—would you believe it?—Sophy never once thought about her

mourning; and Snipkins and I had to take away her coloured dress without her knowing it, and we put a black one in its place—or else, Catherine, I really do think Sophy would still be wearing a blue band round her waist."

"Ah, Mrs Sherbrook," said the best of women, "we know what real feeling is; and yet we rejoice in the Lord." And she repeated a verse from some hymn.

"Do you hear that, Sophy?" asked Aunt Jane, much edified.

I replied that I heard everything Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart said, even when she was tatting.

"The true Christian," continued the admirable Catherine, "is she who rejoices in bereavement, and to whom chastisement is a delight. When my poor dear husband died, I rejoiced in the Lord!"

I was not surprised to hear Mrs Stewart was glad when the lunatic died. She is not the sort of woman who would care for a husband, either sane or insane.

"A happy release! a happy release! Death is ever a happy release!" cried the admirable Catherine, cheerfully. "That is the right way to look at it. When my little girl died, I said, 'A happy release, O Lord!' Sophy should look upon her mother's release as a blessing from the Lord. What years of suffering upon earth she may have escaped! Why, Mrs Thursley might have been an invalid, spitting blood, for the next twenty years, going about from one health-resort to another, and dragging Sophy after her—a miserable

existence, and very expensive! Really, I have no patience with you, Sophy. You would depress any one."

In what a nice pleasant fashion some excellent persons can speak of the great sorrows of life! As if a heartrending grief were like an attack of the measles, —a commonplace distemper, disagreeable for your friends, but easy enough to recover from. How comfortless do the "happy release" kind of cheerful stock phrases sound in the ears of those who grieve with all their heart, and do not rejoice! The hard voice talked on in this "happy release" style, while the cheerful lady tatted with a lively energy that was distracting. She dropped two of her little round rings of tatting, and called me to pick them up. I could not find them on the floor, so I had to look in the tatting-bag, and to take out the collecting-cards and tracts.

"One by one; don't crumple them, Sophy."

I found the tatted rings in the pages of a tract called "Dainty Dishes for Damned Digestions." I was putting the tracts back into the tatting-bag, when my aunt cried out—

"Stop, Sophy; you have got Mr Buggle's 'Sinner' in your hand."

"Mr Buggle's what?" said I.

"His 'Dear Sinner, are you Saved?'" said my aunt. "Sophy, is it possible you never read the tracts Mr Buggle sent you in the first hour of your affliction? Oh, why does your froward heart turn from the means of salvation placed upon its path?"

Shortly after my mother's death, I had received a

bundle of tracts from Mr Buggle, accompanied by a letter of condolence. The tracts, Mr Buggle said, were of his own composition, and had proved a blessing and a balm to the aching soul of many a burdened sinner. The attorney ended the letter with a prayer for my eternal salvation. I tossed the tracts into the fire, and threw in the letter on the top of them. I considered Mr Buggle took a great liberty in writing to me at all, and I did not think his prayers worth six-and-eightpence. Even if I got them for nothing (this was unlikely!), I felt I would rather not have them. I had not seen Mr Buggle half-a-dozen times in my life, but there was no one I disliked more cordially,—not even the admirable Catherine. I could not endure his clerical appearance, bland manner, and benevolent white hair. To my eyes, he was the very picture of a hypocrite. That Buggle would like to have the management of my affairs, thought I. He may pray for it, but he won't get it.

Aunt Jane said she would read us aloud the "Dear Sinner, are you Saved?" "I know, Catherine, *you* will listen to me with pleasure."

"Indeed I will, my dear Mrs Sherbrook," answered the best of women; "when you read, I can always tell where the improving bit of the sentence lies. You do not mix up the sound with the unsound, the chaff with the wheat, the light with the darkness."

My aunt's upper lip relaxed into a smile; but she drew it down again before she began to read, so that it might be all ready to give powerful emphasis to the

sound doctrine. She hammered the following words into our heads: "'Dear sinner, are you saved? Dear sinner, have you experienced the fulness of the Gospel truth? Dear sinner, have you a conviction of SIN? Again I ask, dear sinner—dear, dear sinner—are you saved?'"

"Those are good sound home-thrusts for the sinner's conscience," remarked Mrs Stewart.

My aunt gave a pious sigh: she shook her curls, and asked me what I thought of those searching questions.

I particularly disliked the unctuous language of the tract. "I think," said I, "that Mr Buggle is very fond of sinners; and I am not astonished, for dear dishonest sinners suit some attorneys better than honest men and women."

My aunt turned up her eyes to heaven. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart rather surprised me by her silence. Her piercing black eyes searched mine, as if for a meaning my lips had not expressed, and then they were cast upon the tatting without a word.

When my aunt, having given two powerful sighs, looked down again from the ceiling, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was busy counting her stitches, and her thoughts appeared to be absorbed in the steeple. "I see, Catherine," exclaimed Aunt Jane, "that you did not hear what Sophy said,—and so much the better. The Lord forgive her, and save her against her will, and make the good seed I am now sowing to bring forth fruit in her heart unawares! Amen," said my aunt to her own prayer.

The admirable Catherine merely chucked her shuttle loudly.

My aunt took up the tract again. "Where was I? Oh, I know. 'Dear, dear sinner, are you saved? NO, you are NOT! Come to your sweet Saviour—come——'"

I can write no more. To me this pious twaddle is blasphemous. My pen refuses to blaspheme by transcribing these terms of maundering endearment addressed to the Son of God.

My aunt read on to the end. The tract finished up with a hope that the Dear Sinner might have as blessed experiences of the Fulness of the Gospel Truths as the writer had had during the years he had been employed as a means, under Providence, for the Conversion of Sinners from the error of their ways. Aunt Jane gave due effect to all the capital letters.

The afternoon had become too dark for us to see without candles. We were still in November, and George Snipkins did not bring in the lights before tea-time until the first day of December.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart laid down her tatting. She and my aunt began talking of their own "experiences of the fulness of Gospel truths." Mrs Stewart was eloquent on the subject of her "experiences." In her able hands this religious exercise became a marvellous piece of self-glorification. An experience of the fulness of a Gospel truth sounds as if it meant nothing; but it really meant a great many things, and above all, it meant that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart knew

by experience she was an admirable woman, and an accepted saint, though she might call herself a miserable sinner.

I sat silent, leaning back in my chair like an old woman. Sorrow soon robs one of talking, energy, and passion. My youth seemed passed away. The peculiar language no longer moved me to laughter, or to speak out with indignation. I was content to remain a passive hearer of pious twaddle. But though my dislike to Scriptural cant had become self-contained and silent, it lay deeper in my heart than of old. It had been a dislike—it was now a hatred.

When tears had melted my dull, painless grief into a soft, a sensitive, and nerveless sorrow, I felt what a wretched weak creature I was; how lonely in this uncongenial household; how unable to find strength and comfort in myself. She is dead; and I live, and am alone. There is no satisfaction in life, thought I. My hungry soul craved for love and sympathy to satisfy it. There was no satisfaction in a queer affection devoid of sympathy, like Aunt Jane's. There was more, yet not enough, in Uncle Sherbrook's reserved and almost speechless kindness.

I did not care to live, and so I longed to die. But what did I know of the life beyond the grave? What did I know of God? When my mother had asked me to pray for her, I had felt I was a stranger to God; my prayer was cold and uninspired. I knew I had been but a poor comforter to her soul in the hour of its agony. Yes, indeed; what did I know of God and

death? I knew in my heart that I did not really love God. I knew what love was, so I could not deceive myself. I felt I did not love God as I loved her who now lay dead. When I thought of these things, my spirit sank within me. It was then that I overcame my prejudice against the Bible, and began to read it on the sly, when I managed to escape to the path over the hill. I could read it nowhere else in peace. I should have died sooner than let Aunt Jane know I ever read the Bible to myself. Could the Ethiopian have changed his skin, he would have gone through tortures had he been at all a shy man. I was accustomed to be considered black at Sherbrook Hall; and if I had turned white, I should have made a sensation in this well-regulated household. I should not mind making a sensation in the world, but a sensation in a narrow family circle is a misery I shrink from! To be hermetically sealed with two or three little-minded people, who look at you, wonder at you, and make an event of you—oh, what unceasing worry! I could imagine the horror of being "rejoiced over in the Lord" by Aunt Jane. "She was lost, and now is found!" I could fancy my conversion to the Gospel truth being "proclaimed upon the house-top" a dozen times a-day to Snipkins, to the admirable Catherine, and even to Saint Buggle the attorney. I knew my aunt to be incapable of understanding that in every heart there is a holy place which it is sacrilege to unveil. I could hear her say, "The dear sinner is saved! she has been mercifully led to her salvation! The seed

has brought forth fruit! Come, Sophy—come and tell us how you rejoice the Lord took your poor dear mother to Himself, and thus led you by the narrow path to the waters of life. Tell Catherine your blessed experiences of the fulness of the Gospel truth." Would the rack be worse than this?

Aunt Jane's ludicrous Scriptural language had nearly made a heathen of me. I had conceived a prejudice against the Bible. Why should I lie, and pretend I had not? Words in season, bread cast upon the waters, good seed in bad ground, narrow paths to everlasting salvation, lost sheep, were expressions which made me smile, because I had heard them in my youth so comically misapplied. Even the word "Christian" was associated in my mind with Aunt Jane's "truly Christian gentlemen" and their liver complaints.

But now, when I came to read the Bible myself, without the Snipkins family, Tummus, or the forward young woman, without Dr MacShaw's tedious twaddle, and above all, without Aunt Jane's "words in season," I perceived it is a divine book, an inspired comforter in sorrow. I cannot understand how any one who really likes the Bible can also like twaddle. The life of Christ is written with a simplicity devoid of sickly sentimentality.

If, from some uncouth parody, we have taken a dislike to the metaphors and metre of a poet, and then read the poem, and entering into the spirit of it, see how beautiful are the thoughts and language, we loathe

the parody, for it made us unjust towards genius, and insensible to divine beauty. When I entered into the spirit of the Bible, my laughter was changed into remorse and shame, my prejudice into love. And then it was I loathed that language which is a Scriptural burlesque—a ludicrous parody of what is not ludicrous, but poetical and divine.

Therefore, whenever the best of women and Aunt Jane began to talk of their "experiences of the fulness of Gospel truths," I turned away my thoughts in disgust, and tried not to listen; but you were sure to hear more than you cared for when Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's voice was in the room. I had become a phlegmatic coward, or I should have got up and gone away. I used not to mind if I offended Aunt Jane, but I now nervously avoided making a fuss. Any little thing I did or said was a topic of conversation for a week. The best of women did not easily let a matter drop; and Aunt Jane could talk upon one subject for ever. And yet, though my aunt's garrulity addled my brain, I preferred it to her silence. She had grown huffy with me of late; I think Snipkins made mischief between us. If I displeased Aunt Jane ever so little, she sighed and groaned, and would not speak; and still you could see it was pain and mortification to her to hold her tongue. I would hand her the 'Record,' or hope she did not feel ill, thinking to unlock her lips, and she would look like a martyr, and keep silence. But if I took no notice of her, she shed tears; and then I felt I was a monster, even

when I did not exactly know how I had offended her.

So I sat on in patient silence, gazing out of the window into the twilight. The leafless horse-chestnut, and the dead trim lawn, looked to me like two lone souls dwelling together without sympathy. The leaves which the tree had shed upon the grass were not allowed to rest there. They had been brushed away, as an unfeeling heart would brush aside the tears and cares of others. Oh, what a cheerless view it was! I thought it looked, in the fading twilight, like the land beyond the grave before the dead had risen—while they still lay cold and silent. While the dead lay cold and silent; and I mused on this idea, until I seemed to see the dead of one whole generation lie before me in the twilight, with their hands crossed upon their breast. What a sight was this! And yet, thought I, this is what really happens: generations die, and not one man or woman only; but we shut our eyes and will not see.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's voice in my very ear made me start up with a scream. She had changed her chair to one nearer mine.

"Sophy, you are most ridiculous!" cried she; "wool-gathering in the moon! I don't believe you listen to a word that is said."

The admirable Catherine liked to have an attentive audience when she spoke of her experiences.

"There you are now, Sophy, looking towards the door," said she. "Yes, indeed; I understand. You

mean to run away." And so I did. "But you will just sit down again, if you please, and learn good manners, and wait till James Sherbrook comes, and pour out the tea."

I did not know any one was expected; but when I heard this, I sat down without another word. I liked the Reverend James, and I wanted to know how his sick child was this day.

The Rector had often come to see us of late. I was glad when he came, for he was a kind-hearted and a sympathetic man. He had the tact of a nice nature, and seemed to know by instinct if you disliked your inmost thoughts to be dragged forwards under the curious eyes of near relations and admirable women. In my childhood, when I first knew him, he had gained my affections by refusing to catechise me publicly in the drawing-room. And the Reverend James was not a man who could refuse easily; for it was his nature to agree with everybody. This peculiarity made him the most loved but best abused man in the whole country-side. Over-amiability is a failing the world is hard upon, and judges more severely than a crime. Every one sat in judgment upon the Rector. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart used to snub him unmercifully. Had I been he, I should have snubbed her! But I had never yet known him do so; he bore with true charity the admirable Catherine's taunts and her offensive airs of superior "sound doctrine."

The Rector arrived with the candles. Thank heaven! he and the tea put an end (for the time being) to the

edifying experiences. The tatting began again, and the tatting-bag was removed to the tea-table.

The good-hearted clergyman looked radiant with joy; he said his child had been pronounced out of danger. Aunt Jane was glad to hear this, and congratulated "James" most cordially. Mrs Stewart did not utter a word. She assumed an air of superior wisdom and contempt, which had the effect of immediately cooling my aunt's warmth of manner. This sudden change surprised me, although of late I had often been struck by the singular power my aunt's excellent, indefatigable friend had over her. Aunt Jane followed where the best of women led.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart took no pains to conceal that she thought a poor clergyman with several children ought to be treated like the fool he was, if he went into ecstasies because an eighth baby intended to live and become noisy and hungry, and excessively troublesome and expensive besides. She would have damped the father's joy if she could; but she could not.

Joy was an infectious emotion to me in those sad days. I felt as if the Rector's happy voice brought me to life.

"Daly says there is every hope of our child's perfect recovery," said Mr Sherbrook; "and yesterday we thought him dying."

"Dying! How dreadful!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, carried away by sympathy, in spite of the admirable Catherine's indifference.

"Mary is overjoyed," said the Rector.

"Oh!" cried I, suddenly, "what rapture there must be in hope!"

The tatter's voice called out to me, "Really, Sophy, when you do speak you talk nonsense! Rapture! Stuff! and all about an infant! Where do you pick up such ridiculous words? Come here and pour out the tea, and ring for the muffins. I am quite hungry, I declare! Now, James," said she, vigorously tatting the steeple as she spoke—"now James, we are all very glad the child is better; but if you wish to keep it in health, just tell your wife to have one grain of sense in the way she manages it."

"I think poor Mary tries to do her best," said the Rector, meekly.

"Then let her try and take the child out herself, and give it its proper air and exercise. I am sure a clergyman's wife who has no money to squander on servants, ought not to be ashamed of carrying her own baby through the village, especially when she has relations living there who are not accustomed to much style."

Mrs James Sherbrook is by no means well connected. Old Jack Jones, the yeoman farmer, is her grandfather. So this was a cruel hit; you could see, the rude insulting words cut deeply. Mr Sherbrook's countenance changed, but he kept his temper, and answered—

"Mary and I are no longer ashamed of anything, Mrs Stewart. Our foolish youth is past. We are growing old, and we know that life is a struggle."

There was something pathetic in the poor clergyman's voice and look as he said these words. I noticed, when his face was grave, what an anxious expression he had—a look of poverty, in keeping with his well-worn coat. The cares of life draw certain lines around the mouth and eyes. When we see them, we know what they mean. It grieves one to see them. And I could remember some years ago, in my early girlhood, what a handsome, fashionable-looking man the Rector was! I had got into a scrape once for telling Mary that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart called her husband "our clerical dandy."

The Rector was tall and thin, like all the Sherbrooks and all their family portraits; and yet, though he and my uncle were of the same type, with the same long thin nose and narrow forehead, they were very much unlike. It was the expression of the two faces which was so different. The one man looked important, reserved, severe; and the other modest and genial. My uncle's was a compressed, determined mouth; while the Rector had a good-tempered, and I fear I ought to say, a weak one. At the time I am speaking of, the Reverend James's dark hair and eyebrows made his pale face interesting; while my uncle's grey hair gave his dark skin the sallow hue of a truly Christian gentleman with the jaundice. But it was in their eyes these two men differed most. I lived for years in the same house with Uncle Sherbrook, and yet I cannot now tell of what colour were his eyes: they were hidden by an overhanging eyebrow; there was

nothing of them. The Rector has large, soft, dark eyes, more like a woman's than a man's. You notice them. Gentlemen are apt to speak of them contemptuously, while ladies always admire them and say, "Mr James Sherbrook is a nice man; he has such good eyes!" To this day Mary Sherbrook is in love with her husband's eyes. She tells me in confidence they are "most aristocratic;" and she spoils the four children who have eyes like their father's, more than she does the others who have not. Those who know her will think this quite natural. Mary and her husband are not considered to have any common-sense whatever—they do not even get credit for the little they have.

Mr James Sherbrook was "caught," while still at college, by Mary's intriguing mother. He married young, partly from weakness and affection, and partly from a high sense of honour, a pretty, penniless girl, not quite a lady. Whereupon his father stopped his bachelor's allowance of £900 a-year, and disinherited him in favour of a younger son. Uncle Sherbrook, as head of the family, tried in vain to make up the quarrel. The enraged father (my uncle's first cousin) was an obstinate old Sherbrook, with a great deal of the green bear in him. He told my uncle no one should interfere between him and his son, and requested Uncle Sherbrook to leave his house. The cousins never met again. I never even saw the crusty old Sherbrook. I know he died years before my uncle, and did not leave a farthing to his eldest son.

He was dead when I came to live at Sherbrook Hall.

Had Uncle Sherbrook really been a crowned potentate as well as an infallible ruler, his cousin James would have been heir-presumptive to his throne and right divine: as it was, James Sherbrook was next-of-kin, but heir to nothing except the right divine, for the entail died with my uncle.

Uncle Sherbrook was not the man to let so near a relation starve. He had many drops of clannish Scotch blood in his veins; so when the living of Harefield fell vacant, he had presented it to his cousin James. Aunt Jane has often told me how "dear Edward sent for James, and spoke to him in such a sensible way, and gave him such good advice, and told him he had ruined his prospects in life and disgraced his family by a foolish, imprudent marriage (old Jack Jones's granddaughter, and such a lover of dress!). And then Edward examined James—for you know, Sophy, your uncle was a clergyman once, before his elder brother died, and he still wears a white necktie, and never will have a moustache or a beard, but only very, very small whiskers; and Edward found James was quite sound in his views—and indeed, your uncle said James agreed with everything he said; so Edward gave James the living, and told him to preach the Gospel."

The living is worth but little more than £200 a-year. The young couple fell into difficulties before they knew where they were. My mother told me

Mary never seemed to realise they were in debt; but the Rector was horrified, and went and sold most of his furniture and all his pretty college knick-knacks and prints. He starved himself, tried hard to live upon nothing, and finally paid his debts. Had James Sherbrook been a nobleman, with £20,000 a-year, who had condescended to live on £5000 and pay his debts, every one would have pitied him, and the county would have rung with his praises. I imagine no one pitied the poor Sherbrooks, or praised them for their honesty and self-denial. I have constantly heard Aunt Jane say their difficulties served them right, for James had taken nobody's advice when he married. Yet she was not unkind to them. She gave them a large Family Bible, and a table to put it on; also a set of expensive but most uncomfortable dining-room chairs. "The children must not learn to loll at their meals," said she. I know she said this,—she has often told me she did. When you live with Aunt Jane, you soon learn to know nearly everything she has said in the course of her life.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had looked upon these gifts with an evil eye. Whenever Aunt Jane wished to give James and Mary a present, Mrs Stewart would say, "Now, Mrs Sherbrook, if you take my advice, you will not waste your money upon those silly people. Let old Jack Jones come forward and give his granddaughter a proper fortune." If my uncle were present, Mrs Stewart did not mention Jack Jones; he would have considered any allusion to this

sore point an insult. When a Sherbrook marries, the wife becomes a Sherbrook: society is bound to receive her as such. She herself is connected with her husband's relations, and not with her own, unless her own family happen to be in a good position.

Who in his senses could have imagined Uncle Sherbrook's cousin was connected with Jack Jones? My uncle had managed to indoctrinate my aunt with his ideas upon this subject; so when Mrs Stewart said that a clergyman's wife ought not to be ashamed of carrying her own baby through the village, as she had relations living there who were not accustomed to much style, Aunt Jane actually shook her curls in disapproval. She could hardly wait until the Rector had finished answering Mrs Stewart before she cried out, "Mary is not strong enough to carry her own baby through the village; and, James, don't advise her to try." A Sherbrook carrying her own infant through the village! What a sight for Harefield to see!"

"Not strong enough!" exclaimed the admirable Catherine, in a bitter tone. She was evidently annoyed at my aunt's daring to advise against her advice. "Not strong enough! She will never be strong enough to be useful, unless she goes for a good, quick walk every morning. I tell you, James, her health will certainly break down if she takes no proper exercise. I see her just dawdling along by Smith's shop and looking in at the window."

Aunt Jane herself liked to look in at Smith's win-

dow; and whenever she drove that way, she stopped at the shop to buy a reel of thread. My aunt is not severe upon her own failings, even when they are the weaknesses of other people; so she said good-naturedly, "Smith has pretty things in his window, Catherine, and I once got a very nice dressing-gown there; it was a red flannel one, with black spots on it, and it was made after an excellent pattern."

The Rector sezied this happy opportunity to put in a word for his poor little wife. "It amuses Mary," said he, "to look in at the shop-windows; she does not like walking backwards and forwards on the county road. I am sure, Jane," he continued, appealing to my aunt,—"I am sure, if you were to see how tired poor Mary is every morning after she has been teaching Jim and Jack their lessons, you would be glad she had any little amusement."

"And is it possible Mary teaches the boys? Well, I am glad to hear that," cried Aunt Jane; "I gave her Dr MacShaw's 'Lessons of Light in Little Lives;' so I hope, James, she reads it regularly to the children."

The Reverend James hummed and hawed, and answered with some embarrassment, "Yes; she reads it to them, and I have read it to them: but I don't know how it is, Jane, I think the world has changed since our youth. I do not find the children care for Dr MacShaw's books."

"They should be made to care for them," said my aunt, solemnly; "and, James, you should be firm, and continue to read Dr MacShaw's admirable lessons."

"But the children won't listen."

"Make them listen!" cried out the best of women from the tea-table.

"They go to sleep, Mrs Stewart."

"Punish them severely!"

"Yes indeed, James," chimed in my aunt; "it is your duty to correct your children. 'Bring up a child in the way he should go, and he will not afterwards depart from it.'"

"'Chasten thy son while there is hope,'" exclaimed Mrs Stewart, 'and let not thy soul spare for his crying.'"

"'Wickedness,' exclaimed Aunt Jane, 'is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.'"

Really it was too bad of these ladies to fling texts at the poor Rector; for had he remarked they were irrelevant, they would have called him *unsound*, and asked him if the Bible could be irrelevant? So I just thought I would quote the Scriptures too, and I said, "'Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.'"

James Sherbrook turned round with a smile.

"Be quiet, Sophy!" burst in one breath from both Solomon's disciples; and Mrs Stewart cried out, "The idea of Sophy quoting the Holy Scriptures! She is quite blasphemous, I declare!" And my aunt cried out, "Really, Sophy, I did think you would give up arguing when your poor dear mother died." Whereat the admirable Catherine exclaimed, "Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, what makes you think the sight of an un-

christian death could convert an unregenerate soul like Sophy's?"

My aunt took out her black-bordered handkerchief. "Poor dear Sophia!" sighed she—"poor dear Sophia!" And she added, turning towards the Rector, "There was no time to send for you, James: besides, there was no one to send, for George had to take care of the plate, and poor Snipkins was so overcome by grief that she could not even give a message rightly; and Robert and Thomas, and the horses, were at Votlingham with Edward. But oh! how I do wish poor dear Sophia had seen a clergyman! because she never cared for prayers, and she never would talk to me about her soul, though I might have been the means, under Providence, of leading her to everlasting salvation."

"Do not grieve, Jane," said the Rector, kindly; "God is ever near us. He is with us in the hour of death. He is a comforter for whom we need not send far to find."

"Take care, James," cried Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, as if she were the Archbishop of Canterbury calling a chaplain to order—"take care what you are saying! That is not sound doctrine! We must search that we may find, and knock that it may be opened to us. Before you give an opinion, ask Sophy if her mother did anything of the kind. Now, Sophy, just come here! You always stick yourself in some back-of-beyond corner; so come out here and give me a second cup of tea, and tell James Sherbrook if at the

last your mother had a conviction of sin, and was brought to experience the fulness of the Gospel truth. Tell him what signs she gave of repentance, and what she said when she was dying."

Some people are so strangely fashioned that they can go through all the details of their dearest friend's death-agony, like willing showmen ; but to others this public violation of the sanctity of those last awful hours of passing life is fraught with pain—intense and sickening pain, such as the showman cannot even conceive. For my part, I bury my dead in my heart as in a grave ; and I think of them always, but I do not wish to speak of them.

Mrs Stewart's words brought vividly to my still high-strung imagination the scene and all the circumstances of my mother's death : it was as if this woman had lifted up the shroud and called me to come and look upon the corpse again, and lecture to an audience on the anatomy of the now pulseless heart.

Coarse woman ! her feelings are blunted, thought I ; and I drew back in disgust still farther from her, as I would have done had she really been an undertaker bidding me "Come ! come ! and look into the coffin, and tell how it was the lady died."

I think my face must have betrayed the horror I felt, for the Rector got up, and stood near Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, and said, in a voice that soothed me because it rang with a sympathetic indignation, "Mrs Stewart, it is not you nor I who should dare to say Mrs Thursley died an unchristian death. God alone

has the right to judge the dead, for to God alone belongs mercy. We have no mercy, no pity, in our heart; we have no sympathy. We are too uncharitable;" and he added, in a tone that rose to anger, "we are too hard, Mrs Stewart."

The best of women let her tatting drop from sheer astonishment. And no wonder! I doubt if she had ever before seen James Sherbrook's sleepy eyes awakened, or known him moved to indignation.

"James," inquired my aunt, "what can be the matter with you, for you seem quite excited speaking to Catherine? And I tell you, James, what it is,—Mary has been giving you too strong tea; and there is nothing so bad for the nerves as strong tea, especially if there is any green in it. And, Catherine, if that is James's tea you are going to pour out, mind you put plenty of water in it. And now, James, if you would take my advice——"

Aunt Jane had the conversation to herself. Mrs Stewart remained silent; the tatting lay upon her lap. Her first look of amazement changed to one of bitterness and wrath when she fully realised that weak man the Rector had actually disagreed with her. Astounding fact! unlooked-for impudence!

Aunt Jane's fluid mind flowed on. It started from tea and the Rector's nerves, and touched on the cold compress, unsound doctrine, and the lowering of the franchise. "Duncan Stewart said this measure would be the ruin of the country, and so it is. And, you know, Duncan was Edward's third cousin, and he

married first of all a Campbell, but she died; so what did he do but marry a young wife in his old age,—and an Irish lady too, and by no means strictly brought up! He met her at Harrogate—I meant to say Buxton. No, I am quite right—it was at Harrogate he met her; and the doctors had sent him there to drink the waters. Just like the doctors to send him there; and they quite mistook his complaint, and the waters nearly killed him. I hear she was pretty, and silly, and dressed like a Frenchwoman, and never went to church twice on Sunday unless she had two new bonnets—one for the morning service, and one for the afternoon. And by the by, James, while I am talking of churches, you really ought to preach a sermon on the vanity of dress, because you could take your text from St Peter; and it might do the farmers' daughters and Smith's girls a great deal of good, for it quite shocks me when I look down from the gallery and see a flower-garden planted on the top of every woman's head. And Catherine and I set them such a good example! Before I went into mourning for poor dear Sophia, I always wore my plainest bonnet in church—indeed I did. And when I was young, I can assure you, James, it was a real pleasure to look down from the Abbey pew, for you saw nothing but nice tidy straw bonnets, with plain ribbons crossed on the top of them, for there used not to be an artificial flower in Harefield."

In a few seconds more, I think Aunt Jane's thoughts would have drifted on to the modern Babylon, had not Mrs Stewart interrupted their easy flow.

"Mrs Sherbrook," she cried, in her rasping voice, and fixing her small black eyes not on Aunt Jane, but on the Rector,—"Mrs Sherbrook, it is not we who set the fashion in Harefield church; we sit up in the gallery. When the clergyman's wife plays the harmonium near the reading-desk, all the girls in the village take the pattern of *her* bonnet. If she wears pink and grey ribbons and pink roses on Easter Sunday, Smith's daughters will copy her colours and her flowers before Whitsuntide."

The Rector's pale face flushed again, but he did not get angry. When a soft-natured, amiable man has given way to indignation, he is startled by his own vehemence, and seems to think he has put himself altogether in the wrong. The anger vanishes, and he falls into humility and repentance. The Rector rose to take leave. This was the best thing he could do under the circumstances, as he was too much of an amiable Christian to give the admirable Catherine what she deserved.

"Why are you in such a hurry, James?" said Aunt Jane; "and you have only had one cup of tea! Don't be afraid, James, for that tea will not do you any harm; so sit down again, and take another cup."

The Rector excused himself, but with difficulty. My aunt seemed to think he was running away solely because he feared to keep his nerves any longer in temptation.

James Sherbrook shook hands with the admirable Catherine. He said to her kindly, as if he wished to

forgive her, "Mrs Stewart, I daresay my wife would be a wiser woman were she a little less fond of a pretty bonnet. But I cannot find it in my heart to worry her by interfering in such small matters."

"Small matters!" retorted Mrs Stewart—"small matters indeed! Is it a small matter, Mr Sherbrook, to corrupt the taste of all the girls in Harefield?"

"Well," answered the Rector, "I never looked at it in that light. You may be right, Mrs Stewart."

"I declare," thought I, "he will agree with her. He likes to agree with everybody."

"When our little boy has quite recovered," continued the Rector, "I will try and give Mary a hint. I cannot speak to her at present, Mrs Stewart, for she is still anxious about the child."

My anger rose, and I came out of my corner. "Mr Sherbrook," said I, "don't tease your poor little wife. She is taking care of her children, and nursing that sickly crying infant. She is going to heaven, so let her go there in a pretty bonnet if she likes. There are plenty of disagreeable women going somewhere else in ugly ones,"—my voice grew louder—"women," cried I, "with evangelical pokes on their heads and tatting-bags upon their arms."

"Oh, James!" exclaimed my aunt, aghast, "Sophy said '*somewhere else*,' but I fear she meant to say something more dreadful still." My aunt spoke in a whisper, and looked as if she had made a terrible and wonderful discovery.

I think the Rector feared I might discuss the point,

so he left the room in haste without another word. He never discussed questions of theology with me. Perhaps he was not quite sure what I might say; and as he liked agreeing with his adversary, this uncertainty was awkward. With the soundest intentions, he might have found himself agreeing to unsound doctrine.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart never liked me. When I told her for what place I considered disagreeable women, with ugly bonnets on their heads and tatting-bags upon their arms, were bound, I do not think she disliked me more than she had done before. Such remarks were "just like Sophy."

It will seem strange that, while I remained exactly where I was in Mrs Stewart's estimation, the Rector's reproof—or rather, hint at a reproof—metamorphosed him into a perfect monster. James Sherbrook became "such a censorious, violent man—so rude! quite disgraceful for a clergyman!"

I know the best of women always disliked the heir-presumptive to my uncle's right divine; I think because she feared my uncle might make him the heir of something else besides. She longed to hate the Reverend James, so she seized the first opportunity and made the most of it. Out of the rambling conversation detailed in the last chapter, she forged a pair of tools with which she undermined Aunt Jane's good opinion of Edward's cousin James. It was possible to

make Aunt Jane think anything, if you only knew how to manage her mind. Could I have condescended to become a flatterer, I might have twisted that mind round my finger. If you told Aunt Jane her own judgment was infallible and her own good sense unerring, she would let herself be entirely guided by yours. Snipkins knew this right well, and so did that saintly man Mr Buggle, and so did that clever woman Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart.

The admirable Catherine had, moreover, the knack of persuading her dear Mrs Sherbrook that dear Mrs Sherbrook had observed a great many things this good lady had never perceived at all—little points my aunt was incapable of noticing, impressions she had not imagination enough to receive. Aunt Jane had a way of looking and not seeing; but she thought herself singularly acute: so when she put on her excellent friend's spectacles, she was proud of her own unaided powers of sight and observation.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart persuaded Aunt Jane the Rector's visit had left two impressions on her mind—that is, on Aunt Jane's mind, not on Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's. The two impressions were: firstly, that James, though he was a clergyman, gave his children no religious instruction, but allowed them to grow up like undisciplined heathen; and secondly, that James had been exceedingly rude to Catherine, that he had quite lost his temper, and had behaved neither like a Christian nor a gentleman. Yes! James had gone out of his way to insult Catherine.

As I listened to Mrs Stewart, I discovered it is by no means difficult to make out that a very amiable man has a bad temper. You judge him by the standard of his own amiability. If he frowns, he has performed a miracle on purpose to insult you, or else you perceive what an exceedingly violent man he really is, only he does not show his temper like most people; he takes good care to hide it. He is a hypocrite!—a hypocrite, and a rude, cross man! This is what that mild Christian, the Rector, became in a very few days. This is the impression Aunt Jane was brought to imagine James Sherbrook's own conduct and words had left upon her mind; for she believed she had a mind.

My aunt quite forgot she had parted from the Rector on the best of terms, and that she had merely thought his nerves were a little out of order. I said this to Aunt Jane; I begged her to think of the facts of the case, and not of her own impressions; I tried to reason with her, but I soon left off in despair! My aunt had come to a certain conclusion—she did not know how; she only knew that her conclusions were always right; and as to Sophy, did she ever take anybody's advice? or poor dear Sophia either? And then Aunt Jane would sail on from one thing to another, till I did not know where we were. How a woman runs before the wind if she has not got an anchor in her mind!

The Rector paid his memorable visit on a Wednesday. On the Saturday following, I heard Aunt Jane say to Mrs Stewart—"Perhaps I had better write to

him, Catherine, and ask for an apology. Yes, that is the right course to take, and I am sure it is! for Edward will soon be asking James and Mary to dine. I know he will, for it is three months since the funeral; and how is it possible, Catherine, for you to meet James, unless he has offered you an ample apology?" "No, no, my dear Mrs Sherbrook! pray do nothing of the kind. I would not humble James Sherbrook for the world! I can forget! I can forgive!" I think Mrs Stewart saw she had gone far enough: she dissuaded Aunt Jane from writing to the Rector—she made her promise not to write—she spoke anxiously, energetically, as if she were tatting the promise into my aunt's brain, and fastening it there with a good strong knot.

I perceived Mrs Stewart had taken fright, and I knew why. Aunt Jane read most of the letters she wrote and all those she received to "Edward," and not unfrequently "Edward" read them over again to himself. He would read a business letter twice, perhaps three times. Mrs Stewart was aware a note such as Aunt Jane proposed sending the Reverend James would be considered a business letter by Uncle Sherbrook. The subject of it would become a matter of solemn inquiry. Mrs Stewart would have to state her grievance in the study. Sophy would be called as a witness, and who could tell what Sophy might not say? And then the admirable Catherine knew very well my uncle would not be adverse to giving a verdict in favour of the Rector. The cousins were good

friends: a ponderous infallible with a kind heart, but apt to be bilious, likes a modest, weak man of good feeling, and an amiable, yielding temper.

My uncle had not been particularly cordial to Mrs Stewart of late. He had shown signs of impatience more than once when she went tatting that steeple at dinner between the courses, instead of letting Satan find mischief for her hands to do as well as for her tongue.

One morning at breakfast, about a week after the Rector's visit, my uncle told Aunt Jane that Robert said the horses would get their death of cold if they continued to be taken out in the night dews, and that if the bay mare caught cold she would be a roarer for the rest of her days. I expect Mrs Stewart gave Robert a great deal of trouble and no "tips."

"Jane," said my uncle, "you must tell Mrs Stewart"—he never called her Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart —"Jane, you must tell Mrs Stewart what Robert says."

My aunt raised a cry of lamentation. "But, Edward," she exclaimed, "poor Catherine will have to walk! Her brown horse is ill, for he has never got well."

"No, nor never will get well," said my uncle, most decidedly; "ladies know nothing of horses. They keep them going all day and all night, make them take every hill at a gallop, and expect them to last for ever."

My uncle said this with an air of solemn conviction. He held very strong opinions on the subject of ladies

and horses—opinions which Robert Jones took care should never grow weak. What really ailed the brown horse was over-starvation and old age. I knew this, but kept silence. I had no longer liveliness or courage enough to hint to Uncle Sherbrook that there might be other reasons for the brown horse's illness besides galloping up the Simplon.

"Tell Mrs Stewart," continued my uncle, "to give her horse away and to buy another, and then to get a coachman who can drive."

"What!" cried Aunt Jane; "get another coachman? and send away old Dan? And Catherine tells me he will attend at table, and dust the dining-room, and clean the boots, and look after the garden; and she says he can boil milk for her coffee when she has not got a cook; and Catherine would not send him away, because she says no one else would take him, so she keeps him from motives of Christian charity, for she is an excellent Christian-minded woman! and certainly, Edward, it is very good of Catherine to keep old Dan out of mere charity."

So it was; and yet I could not help thinking that if Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart kept a younger man from other motives, he might not clean the harness, dust the dining-room, boil the milk, turn his hand to everything, and stay in her service without proper livery, proper food, and, above all, without his beer, like poor, old, battered Dan.

While I was thinking thus, Aunt Jane kept talking

on about Christian charity, Sunday-schools, and old Dan. We are led to believe in our childhood that gold falls from the lips of good ladies. If so, Aunt Jane's mouth might be likened to an old-fashioned purse, with running strings at the top. When the upper lip was dragged down, it looked tightly closed; but let go the running-strings, and the bag was wide open, and all the gold poured out. My aunt was saying, "I can assure you, Edward, Dan has very good principles — Catherine says he has excellent principles; for when he was a child he went to a Sunday-school in Aberdeen, and Dr MacShaw used to say the Lord's Word was taught north of the Tweed; and we all know what early training can do either for good or for evil; and Catherine finds Dan invaluable, for though he was brought up in Scotland, he belongs to the Church of England; and Catherine thinks that all-important, and says she would not have a servant who belonged . . ."

My uncle cut a slice of bread in two upon the wooden platter, with a look of serious determination in his face, as if he were severing Mrs Stewart's Dan and the brown horse from Robert and the bay roarer. "Jane, you are straying from the point," said he.

It was not often that Uncle Sherbrook said, "Jane, you are straying from the point;" but when he did say these words, his manner made them impressive.

Aunt Jane had a great respect for her husband, and a sincere admiration for the intellectual and logical

powers of his mind. Had my uncle spoken oftener and less slowly, I doubt if his wife would have considered him the great and wise man she did. Aunt Jane was always much impressed when "Edward" told her to keep to the point. I think she looked upon this concentration of mind as the result of that philosophical training which had enabled "Edward to take such a wonderful degree at college!" She generally made some remark to this effect, but she rarely made one to the point. On the occasion I speak of, she exclaimed,—"Straying from the point! what point? My dear Edward, remember I am not as great a philosopher as you are, for I never went to Cambridge like you!"

This compliment to his superior grasp of mind mollified my uncle.

"My dear Jane," said he, "I merely want to impress upon you that I should like Mrs Stewart to be told as soon as possible—this evening if you can—that Robert says the night dews will give the horses cold, and make the bay mare a roarer."

"Very well, Edward—very well," said my aunt; "I will tell Catherine what Robert says; but it certainly is a great pity the bay mare is so delicate; and I know Robert does think she is very delicate indeed, because I heard him telling Sophy if he were not careful to take her out cool, as he called it, and to bring her in cool, she would get some terrible disease, I think in the fetlock, or perhaps it was a spavin."

"Robert," said my uncle, "is a careful coachman; he knows what horses are, and he knows what ladies are. Let me tell you, Jane, you are most fortunate in having a man who refuses to gallop your horses to death." As if Aunt Jane ever had the smallest inclination to go out of a very slow trot!

My aunt began to eat her breakfast: she had nearly finished it when she exclaimed suddenly, the idea seemingly only striking her for the first time—

"Why, my dear Edward, if we do not send Catherine to Riverbank in the carriage, she cannot sleep at home. I forgot she could not walk back alone at night."

"She can sleep at home, Jane, by never leaving home." My uncle spoke like an oracle.

"And where is Catherine to dine?" cried Aunt Jane.

"In her own house," said my uncle.

"How can she dine at home without a cook?" asked my aunt, so excited in her mind that she miraculously kept to the point.

"She can get a cook," said Uncle Sherbrook.

"No, no, Edward! she can't! because she tells me all the cooks about here are Dissenters or Papists; and Catherine would take no one who did not belong to the Church of England and hold sound views; and you know we are just the same, Edward; and what should we have done? only our excellent Snipkins had a good-natured sister who kindly became a

cook to please us; and you know Snipkins said to me . . ."

My uncle took up a blue-buggle which lay beside his plate. Aunt Jane talked on for some time; whenever she stopped to draw her breath, I nodded my head and said, "Indeed!" She was quite satisfied, and went on again, and thought I was listening; but I have not a notion what she said.

Every morning at a quarter to twelve I went out with Aunt Jane, and we walked three times up and down the back avenue. Unless my aunt was in a huffy humour, she talked incessantly. She could make the same remarks and talk about the same things over and over again. As we took our last turn, she would wonder each day if Catherine would come to luncheon. She generally "wondered" standing on the same spot in the avenue. There were three elm-trees and a clump of laurel bushes so connected in my mind with Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, that when I saw them I thought of her.

But the whole avenue became associated in my imagination with this lady on the morning Uncle Sherbrook told Aunt Jane what Robert said about the horses catching cold in the night dews. Ever after, a holly bush near the back lodge made me think of the bonnet in which the best of women collected for the conversion of the French infidels; for it was the kindness, the sympathy, the good feeling, the tenderness, the affection, the heartfelt sorrow shown

by that excellent creature Catherine in wearing her black evangelical coal-scuttle as a tribute of respect to my mother's memory, which made Aunt Jane feel she would be an ungrateful wretch if she let Mrs Stewart dine by herself at Riverbank. It was a clever instinct which prompted this keen-sighted flatterer to lay aside the bonnet with the red feather and the sound but moderate views. It gave Aunt Jane real pleasure to see her friend wear mourning, because there is no doubt that she derived much satisfaction from the black look of the people around her. Her own crape was awful to behold; she would not even wear a white collar. I often saw her gaze at me with an air of mournful satisfaction, for she and Madame Julie Browne had put me into a complete suit of "orphan's mourning." My appearance was ghastly—it shocked me when I saw myself in the glass.

During our last turn on the back avenue, Aunt Jane slackened her pace (as usual) when we were passing the three elm-trees and the laurel bushes.

"I wonder if Catherine will come to luncheon!" cried she. "Poor dear creature! she has not got a cook! and I greatly fear she will not be able to get one before Christmas; and what is she to do until the brown horse gets well if we cannot send her home in the evening? And, Sophy, did you hear your uncle say the brown horse never would get well? and Edward knows a great deal about horses; and if he

thinks the bay mare will become a roarer, I am quite sure she will, so I cannot ask him to send Catherine home any more; so I will tell you what I will do—I will ask Catherine to come and spend the month of December with us, for I am sure Edward will be delighted to have her staying in the house at Christmas. She is such an excellent, indefatigable, cheerful creature, always occupied in a good work, and full of nice feeling. To think of her going into mourning for poor dear Sophia! Indeed I can never forget . . ."

Really, I had thought the subject of the black bonnet was exhausted at the other end of the avenue! I thought we had left it sticking in the holly bush; but Aunt Jane started upon it afresh, as if the evangelical poke were a new topic! I am thankful to say she had not been talking very long before I heard the warning-bell. She heard it too, and hurried home so fast that she got out of breath and could not speak.

When we sat down to luncheon, I found my aunt had quite recovered the use of her tongue. It would have been pleasanter for my uncle had she remained speechless a little longer.

I need hardly say Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart sat opposite me at table.

With characteristic want of tact, Aunt Jane told her what "Edward" had said about the horses. "And now, my dear Catherine," said she, "you really must

come and stay here, as you have not got a cook; and you must spend the month of December with us, for you will cheer us up at Christmas." She appealed to my uncle. "Now, Edward, must not Catherine come and stay here? Don't you insist upon it?"

I pitied Uncle Sherbrook. A look of anger and disgust crossed his face; but he kept his temper wonderfully. He had all the fine old-fashioned ideas of good-breeding and hospitality in his own house.

"Mrs Stewart," said he, with formal politeness and great self-command — "Mrs Stewart, I insist upon nothing, but I beg you will do me the honour to accept Mrs Sherbrook's invitation."

For a sincere man, this speech was the triumph of good manners.

The quick-sighted Catherine threw one of her penetrating glances at my uncle. I am convinced those black eyes of hers could read people's thoughts. I actually admired the woman: she was so clever!

In one look she saw how things were, and she refused the invitation — although I am sure she was dying to accept it. Aunt Jane pressed her to say she would come. "Come, Catherine, come and spend Christmas with us, for you know you have not got a cook." But Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart refused bravely. She explained to us how she felt bound to put her hand to the plough and go forth amongst her friends, praying them to give their mite towards the mainten-

ance of the Society for the Promotion of Christianising Influences in the Homes of the East, of the Society for the Promotion of True Religion in Infidel Lands, and of other societies engaged in promoting godliness and morality at home and abroad. My uncle was so pleased at her steadfast refusal, that his manner softened towards her.

In the course of that afternoon, I happened to be crossing the hall, and I saw Robert Jones coming out of the study. "Ho, ho!" I said to myself, "Uncle Sherbrook is so glad to get rid of the admirable Catherine, that he will send her home in the carriage to-night. Now that he is sure she is going away, he and Robert will think the bay mare may venture out without becoming a roarer."

I found I was quite right; for when we were leaving the dinner-table, my uncle bowed, and said with Chesterfield urbanity, "Mrs Stewart, I have spoken to my coachman; and the night being fine, he apprehends no ill effects should the horses be taken out. The carriage will therefore be at your disposal at whatever hour you may wish to name."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart looked quite elated. Her self-denial was rewarded: had she not stepped back again into my uncle's good graces? She thanked him, and said she would leave immediately after prayers.

"You will understand, Mr Sherbrook, and you will appreciate, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, my wish to remain until after the evening sacrifice of prayer and praise."

I cannot be bored repeating the Magnificat Aunt Jane thereupon sang in honour of the best of women. It was no short hymn of praise, for it went on most of the evening.

As I talked to my uncle, by the fireside, of the weather, I heard my name mentioned. Like the word *Selah* in the Psalms, it sounded foreign to the text; so I looked round, and beheld Aunt Jane shaking her curls and casting up her eyes. Mrs Stewart had laid down her shuttle, and I saw her take a handful of tracts out of the tatting-bag, and give them to my aunt; and then there was another shake of the head, and the Magnificat began again.

The parting between Aunt Jane and her excellent friend was like that of two kissing, loving schoolgirls. Mrs Stewart took out her handkerchief (a black-bordered one) and held it to her eyes.

Next morning I was late for the Commentary. I could not get on my stockings; I could not put on my shoes; there was something stuck in the armhole of my dress; and I could not find room for a handkerchief in my pocket. Pocket, sleeves, shoes, and stockings were all stuffed with tracts! A tract prevented the right shoe from fitting me, and a tract filled the toes of the left one. When I put my hand into my pocket, I pulled out, "Old Buttons for New Buttonholes," "Large-eyed Needles for Christian Camels," "Satan's Sops to Sinners' Souls; or, Modern Mops for Mighty Miracles," and "Cheap Chopsticks from the

Charitable Christian to the Chinese, by the author of 'Nut-crackers for the Negroes;'" and I dragged the "Accepted Assassin; or, Have You Killed the Old Adam?" out of my stocking.

Really no writers can be more scandalously silly, when they are not blasphemous, than the truly pious authors of some evangelical tracts.

CHAPTER III.

MANY little things had proved a consolation to Aunt Jane during the first three months after her sister's death. It had taken her all that time to answer the letters of condolence she had received; not because the letters were numerous, but rather because Aunt Jane liked answering them at length. It was not in her nature to dash off such letters without texts and forethought. I also discovered there was enduring consolation for my aunt in the plumes and weepers and gloom of the funeral. I had noticed Aunt Jane was continually holding a scrap-book in her hand; she hardly ever held a book, so my curiosity was excited, and I took up the scrap-book: it opened of itself where a piece cut out of the 'Dullshire News' was pasted in. This extract proved to be an account of my mother's funeral! A sort of undertaker's description of plumes and scarves, and mutes, and mourning-coaches; and of a brass-nailed, brass-plated velvet coffin, containing inner ones of polished deal and lead. Disgusted, I let fall the book! My aunt astounded me.

"What balm for a heartache!" cried I; and I

stooped down and picked up the scrap-book, and laughed as I glanced over the description again. Hideous mutes! Had I not seen them? and oh! what a sight they were, aping a grief they did not feel! as if there was not grief enough in the world without a make-believe! And is it not comforting to read how the person we loved best on earth lies down in the grave, hidden away for ever in a velvet coffin with a brass-plate on the top, and nails all round,—safely imprisoned in a jail without door? How comforting to think she never can come back again! How comforting! laughed I; how comforting! But as I laughed, the tears choked me.

When the admirable Catherine said good-bye, I had given a sigh of relief. If good women must tatt steeples, what a blessing it is, thought I, when they no longer tatt them within our sight and hearing!

Had any one told me that before two months were past, I should be wishing Mrs Stewart back again, how I should have laughed that person to scorn. But a change of feeling will sometimes come over us unawares, like old age. It is not to-day our hair turned grey, nor yesterday, nor the day before; nor yet was it suddenly, between sunrise and sunset, that I discovered the best of women had been a blessing to me, because she had been an occupation to Aunt Jane, and a leader to a mind which could not lead itself. Little by little it dawned upon me that I ought to have felt grateful to that hard woman for her want of feeling, and for her clattering, "happy release" way of

talking. Besides, she had a good appetite, and never got hysterics; so Aunt Jane followed her example, and ate well, and did not cry. And then my aunt found such pleasant excitement in wondering each morning on the back avenue if Catherine would come to luncheon. And how it filled her vacant brain to think of Catherine's horse, and her bonnet, and her good works, and her unchristian sisters-in-law, and her rude enemies, and her quarrels, and her cook. Oh, that cook! "Dear, excellent, indefatigable creature! Why, she has not got a cook!" What endless conversation may lie in an empty kitchen!

Aunt Jane had been excited and amused without knowing it. She no longer missed "poor, dear Sophia." Why should she? They had lived apart for years. Her sister might just have been in town; not dead. Truly death is only half a grief if during life you have been able to live happily out of sight of the friend whose loss you mourn. It is a sorrow easily borne if you can walk on from the grave and forget for one moment you are alone. The pang of separation is only known to those who as they walk must turn at every step and listen, but never hear the footstep, the voice they long to hear: who must look, but cannot see the face they love.

When Aunt Jane was beginning to be comforted, I was only beginning to know the full bitterness of my misery. The shock of the sudden death had benumbed me for months after I thought that I had awakened from the first dull stupor. My mother's

death, coming without warning, had indeed been a great shock to me. Death had stolen, as I might say, up the back-stairs in the midst of bad tempers, unpunctuality, Miss Hemmer's coals, Snipkins's ill-nature, and Uncle Sherbrook's crossness and fuss—all so important, and death unperceived. In our heart we ever think death will come like a king, with trumpeters and guards. If he slips in alone at the back-door while the cook is scolding, we do not even know him, till of a sudden we open our eyes and see he stares us in the face.

Aunt Jane did not take much notice of me until Mrs Stewart had gone some little way on her collecting tour. It unfortunately then struck her that I did not look in good spirits. She took into her head my sorrow was greater than hers, and this piqued her. "Poor dear Sophia! my own sister! and I knew her before Sophy was born!"

Aunt Jane actually became jealous of my grief—more from want of occupation than from anything else. This will only seem incredible to those who do not know what the vacant minds of some women are made of.

And so it happened that when Aunt Jane began to be comforted, she lamented the loudest. I could not see her weep unmoved. I had grown weak in nerves and mind, and I dreaded this weakness which I felt was overmastering me. When tears, midnight tears unnerve us, we long in that hourly struggle for self-command to be alone; or if we cannot be alone, we

long for some strong tearless heart to live with us in sympathy, and yet in silence — not lamenting, not harping on the thought which fills us both. I have heard of two captives chained together in one dungeon, who grew to hate each other more than they hated the men who had chained them in their cell. If the prisoners were two weak, crying women, I believe the tale. Oh, what nerveless misery it is for two hysterical women to be chained together!

I wished we had seen more of Uncle Sherbrook. It is true he was not sympathetic; but he was calm, and did not cry, and Aunt Jane became almost rational in his presence.

He lived in his study. There were iron safes for the wills and title-deeds in that study—locked boxes, with other boxes and drawers locked inside them. I came to think Uncle Sherbrook was very like one of these big chests: he had been open once, but his sympathy and heart seemed all shut up again, and he tried to keep them safely locked. I perceived he was ashamed of having betrayed so much feeling at the time of my mother's death; yet I do not think my uncle repented of the kind words he had said to me, or had forgotten them, for in the evening after dinner he would draw an old-fashioned, long-legged, calico-covered stool beside his own arm-chair; and I knew he liked me to go and sit there for an hour, and talk to him about the weather. Had Uncle Sherbrook had a daughter of his own, I knew he would have drawn the calico-stool for her; so, although it was uncom-

fortable, and I was bored to sit there and bored to talk for an hour of the weather, I still in a sort of way liked to sit by my uncle's side, because I thought he liked to have me there, and the world felt less cold to me.

I often wished some one might be invited to dinner, for then perhaps I could have talked of something else besides the weather: unless there are great thunderstorms and hurricanes, I soon tire of this subject. As ill-luck would have it, the Rector caught the measles from his children, or I am sure my uncle would have insisted on asking him and Mary to dine. Now there was no chance of our seeing any of the rectory people, old or young, for the next two . . . for the next three months. "Sophy," Aunt Jane repeated constantly; "Sophy, you must not go near the rectory, for your uncle has never had the measles, and I know he has not, though he thinks he has, and they are very dangerous at his age; and indeed I hope James may recover; but it is so like Dr Daly, never to have discovered the baby had the measles, for I am sure that is what the child really had all the time; and it is so like Mary not to have isolated James when the other children were ill; for even if they had run all over the house, Mary might have kept James in the back kitchen, because it is not so small a place as you imagine, Sophy; for Edward improved all that part of the rectory when he gave the living to James."

Aunt Jane was kind in sending soups and jellies to the rectory; and it was a great pity James Sherbrook

could not come himself to thank her while Mrs Stewart was away on her collecting tour. I know my aunt would have completely forgiven him for being "so rude to Catherine," and would have forgotten he did not bring up his children in the way they should go. Besides, she would have been delighted to see any one: it would have amused her, and there would have been a satisfaction in giving "James and Mary" good advice, and a positive pleasure in correcting the children, now that we never saw a soul, or went anywhere, not even for a drive! Robert said the bay mare wanted a thorough good rest. There was a little open carriage we might have driven in with one horse, but Robert kept that carriage at the back of the coach-house.

Lady Arabella Scott wrote to Aunt Jane asking if she might come and see her. This was very kind of Lady Arabella, as it was a long winter's drive from Mineham to Sherbrook.

"Lady Arabella is really no relation," said Aunt Jane; "and I fear it is rather too soon to receive strangers."

My aunt told me she wrote back, saying that at present she was in too deep mourning to receive her friends, however dear they might be. I am sure it gave Aunt Jane real pleasure to write this letter on very black-edged paper. All the same, I was surprised to find she was a little huffed with Lady Arabella for taking her at her word.

Aunt Jane would have liked visitors to come, but

she would have wept on meeting them. She liked to cry.

I do not wonder poor Aunt Jane thought herself inconsolable; for, by giving way to tears like a child who will not stop crying when it can, and then cannot stop when it will, she had really fallen into a miserably hysterical state. Snipkins, for reasons of her own, had persuaded my aunt she was in too great sorrow to look after the dairy, and far too delicate to think of housekeeping. The maid had cleverly convinced her mistress that certain damp chills of a peculiarly fatal kind lurked in the atmosphere of the housekeeper's room. "Sometimes hi himagines," she would say, "before this 'ere 'ouse was built, there may have been a set of private waults, hor a reglar cemetery, hor it might be ha hancient monks' moshorleem, just under where hi sits hat dinner. Taking honly cold water has hi do, there hare days when I feel ha very sing'lar sort of chill harising hunder the table. Helizabeth 'as to get me a stool for my feet, which 'as become ha mass of chilblains. Hi would not hallow my precious mistress to get a chill. Chills in February hare fatal to the constitution. Hif hi 'ad not the care of my dear mistress, she might go hoff sudden hany day. Mrs Thursley's delicacy was has a mere nothing to 'ers. Hif hi'd 'ad the hoverlooking of that poor dear lady, she'd be halive now. But Miss Sophy, she'd kill hany one ha crocking hof them with fires in Horgus hin hother people's 'ouses, and, hi've little doubt, ha freezing hof them hin winter hat 'ome like hartic women!"

Aunt Jane believed her maid, yet was miserable at having nothing to do. So wretched was she that I took pity on her, and tried to amuse and comfort her, till she grew accustomed to have me always with her; and then she would not let me out of her sight.

I had the terrible misfortune to become her occupation in life.

Aunt Jane fancied she spent the morning in the study with "Edward," occupied about very important business,—in reality she never stayed there more than five minutes at a time. Mr Buggle was still a saint, but no longer a novelty. My aunt only cared for the gossipping, sensational sort of business, such as the dismissal of an attorney, or a farmer, or a servant. She liked a squabble about a neighbour's land; she enjoyed maintaining the right-of-way nearly as much as my uncle did, and she dearly loved helping her husband to make his will. I suppose Uncle Sherbrook had plenty of wills made at the time I speak of, because Aunt Jane never ceased running into the drawing-room to see what "Sophy" was doing.

One morning I had escaped with a book into solitude up-stairs, and my aunt was in my room before I had time to sit down. What a scene we had!

"Sophy, why don't you read down-stairs? I know you run away from me because you think I am a murderess! You think I killed poor, dear Sophia!"

It must have been Snipkins who kept putting this idea into Aunt Jane's head, for it could not have

stayed there by itself. When Dr Daly had reproached my aunt beside her sister's death-bed with having lost the only hope, I can believe she may have felt remorse all that day and perhaps the next; but Aunt Jane is a self-deceiver,—I know her! She and Uncle Sherbrook are infallibles with short memories; and, if let alone, they never think themselves in the wrong for more than forty-eight hours.

"Yes, Sophy, yes!" Aunt Jane exclaimed; "you think I am a murderess! You think I killed poor, dear Sophia!"

I could not hear these oft-repeated words without a shudder. They brought before my mind the death-scene I was struggling to forget; and it is so difficult to forget what you feel you remember each hour of the day and night!

"No, Aunt Jane," I said. "No; I only like to be alone. There is comfort in silence."

"Comfort!" cried she; "comfort! As if I did not want comfort more than you, Sophy! As if I did not feel poor, dear Sophia's death — my own poor sister's death—more than any one else in the world could feel it! But you think I have no heart, Sophy! —you think I have no heart! I know you do!"

My aunt burst into tears. I could not be cruel and go away and leave her alone, so I sat beside her for two long hours, offering her water, bathing her forehead, holding her hand, and soothing her with soft words; but when I dried her tears, she wept again.

At twenty minutes to twelve, Aunt Jane had her

very black "walking things" brought into my room. She said she did not feel strong enough to go into her own. Snipkins dressed her and moaned over her. "My poor, dear mistress!" moaned she. "What an 'eart she 'as—so hovercome! and hif hit hisn't four months since the death, and hagoing hon for five! Hi'll be bound, Miss Sophy's hat the bottom hof this! —she's been rehopening hof the wound! But the Lord sends heverything for our good! 'Eartless, reproachful nieces is halmost better for our souls than kind and Christian-minded ones!"

I never answered Snipkins a word. I had not spoken to her since the day of my mother's death. Silence was no pain to me,—the senseless misery of scenes like this bewildered me.

When Aunt Jane was ready she leant upon my arm, and we went out and walked three times up and down the back avenue. Snipkins had persuaded my aunt she would catch cold if she took even one turn for a change in the kitchen-garden. As to the flower-garden, it was too damp to be thought of for an instant. Aunt Jane dreaded a chill; she was afraid of being "carried off suddenly, like poor, dear Sophia." I know she feared it, because when she spoke of my mother's death, she never failed to say, "A mere chill would not have killed Sophia at her age. So she must have had a weakness of the heart as well as disease of the liver; and, Sophy, your uncle and I never had anything the matter with our heart."

During our walk my aunt kept down her thick

crape veil, while my face was uncovered. She became calmer, perhaps because she was soothed by knowing she looked the blackest picture of woe, although no one saw her but the crows.

She told me with her last sob that she forgave me. I did not care to ask what sin I had committed to require pardon. I was only too glad my aunt imagined she had forgiven me. I knew that for the present the play was at an end, and I rejoiced to find we were not at the first scene of a long day of tears and huffiness.

Another day, one afternoon, I escaped alone to the path over the hill, leaving Aunt Jane to walk down the front avenue with Uncle Sherbrook. My aunt would not speak to me for three whole days! Fancy what she must have suffered in holding her tongue! She looked the most injured of mortals, and sobbed if I left the room, or if I opened a book instead of talking to her — yet she would not answer me if I did speak. But she liked me to speak, so that she might keep silence, and show she was offended. A grievance was an event in life to her, if noticed and made much of; if unnoticed, it made no sensation, and therefore was no event.

Aunt Jane complained to Uncle Sherbrook of my unkind conduct. She told him I would sit and walk apart, and leave her alone for an hour at a time.

"Sophy," said my uncle, "I am much occupied by important business. Even when I am able to walk with your aunt, my mind is too much engaged to

allow of my talking, or indeed of my listening much to what is said. It is your duty, Sophy, as it should be your pleasure, to be your aunt's constant companion, and to administer to her amusement."

My uncle said these words severely, but that was merely his way of speaking. I knew he did not mean to be hard. I was so accustomed to minds with blind sides, like boxes which only open at the top, that Uncle Sherbrook's speech sounded quite natural in my ear. I felt, if I had energy, I might perhaps put a new view of the matter into his head, but my brain was addled; I could explain nothing, not even to myself. I was puzzled and weary. 'Weary of life!

Oh, how wearisome, how wearisome is life, when the heart is empty, and the wasting hungry mind is forbidden to satisfy itself, because others have no appetite! Aunt Jane, unfortunately, was a perfectly unintellectual woman—not from want of education, but from some peculiarity of mind. She had a positive prejudice against books, though she herself did not know it. In fact, she imagined herself to be a great reader, and thought she had read every book worth reading that was not of an atheistical tendency.

It is true she occasionally read out some piece of sound doctrine from a religious newspaper; and it is also true that she went to sleep on Sunday with Dr MacShaw's 'Wisdom of the West; or, Ethics of the East,' or else with his Commentary open on her lap; but every other day of the week, except the blessed

Sabbath, Aunt Jane seemed to associate books with bad manners! It was bad manners for me to read in the evening, bad manners to read at any time in the drawing-room or in the library, and worse to go to your own room and read there. At rare times, on very wet mornings, when the back avenue was quite out of the question, Aunt Jane would take up a book and let me open one also; but when I had opened it, she did not let me read it, for the little she herself read of her own tract, she liked to read aloud with marked emphasis. Aunt Jane's never-ceasing flow of talk tired me to death, for no matter what subject she began with, she soon fell into the words and sayings I had heard before—a hundred times before! And there was no one to listen to her but me!

I grew so wearied from listening to her, that one morning I actually caught myself on the back avenue, wondering with Aunt Jane if Catherine would stay away for ever!

"If Gordon-Sherbrook is really ill"—Gordon-Sherbrook was Mrs Stewart's only son—"if Gordon-Sherbrook is really ill," said my aunt, "and if the regiment is really going to Malta, Catherine may have to spend the winter at . . . at Corfu."

"At Corfu, Aunt Jane? I think she might perhaps be nearer her son at Valetta; though," added I, "he may prefer to have his mother at Corfu."

"Where is Valetta?" asked my aunt. She had arrived at the age when our geography becomes a vague memory of our youth.

"It is in Malta, Aunt Jane."

"What did I say?"

"You said Corfu."

"Now, Sophy, you know perfectly well I meant Valetta; but you delight in arguing and contradicting, and I know you think I am always in the wrong! You think everyone is in the wrong but yourself! and I know you think I killed poor, dear Sophia!"

She shed tears. "I pray," cried she, "I pray to the Lord night and morning that He may take me to Himself, for your constant reproaches are killing me."

"I never reproach you, Aunt Jane," said I, sternly; for I had never done so, and I alone knew how difficult it was to keep the promise of forgiveness I had given her in a moment of excitement and despair.

"There! there!" exclaimed my aunt, "you are going to argue again! But Snipkins knows you reproach me; Snipkins says she is sure you are always reproaching me with your poor, dear mother's death."

"Snipkins! Snipkins!" cried I; and then I stopped. I drove back the words which rose to my lips. This time it was an effort to me; but oh! thought I, what is the use of talking reason to a weeping tongue like this one?

There was no use. I knew there was none. And, indeed, I began to doubt if I had any reason left in my own poor head. The stream of Aunt Jane's mind flowing by my side, pouring worries over my life; and like a river where no rock turns the tide, ever flowing on, on to an open, a confused sea, made me

feel as if my own bewildered brain had turned to water. I felt as if I never could think again, as if my power to grasp a clear idea were gone.

I longed to leave Sherbrook Hall. I was miserable there, but I could not help feeling my uncle did not wish me to go. I knew he liked to have me, partly, perhaps, because I relieved him of the trouble of listening to Aunt Jane. I did not want to leave Uncle Sherbrook's house in an ungracious manner, as if I hated it, and yet I grew so impatient of the slowly-passing, tedious hours and days and weeks and months, that my longing could no more be stifled. I determined to tell Uncle Sherbrook I wished to go back to my own home. I thought it would be much easier to tell him so when Aunt Jane was not by; but I despaired of ever getting the chance of seeing him alone. Aunt Jane seemed to be always following me everywhere.

At last my opportunity did come.

Snipkins had written to London for a large quantity of groceries. Aunt Jane luckily happened to see the box arrive, and she wondered so incessantly what could be inside it, that Snipkins kindly permitted her to see it unpacked. A roaring fire was lighted in the housekeeper's room, Snipkins's own arm-chair was put exactly before it, and Aunt Jane, as if risking her life, was carefully wrapped in a shawl, and nearly dying of heat, was allowed to see her own tea and coffee and sugar weighed. This ceremony could not in any way prove injurious to

the housekeeper's perquisites, as Snipkins's "precious mistress" had no notion how long ninety pounds of tea might be supposed to last in the servants' hall. It was wise of Snipkins to permit my aunt to see her own groceries weighed. Aunt Jane seemed grateful to her maid; she also felt she was mistress in her own household, and knew by experience that she ruled her servants and managed her affairs with order and economy.

I was sure the grocery ceremony would occupy hours, so when once I had seen Aunt Jane safely installed over the "hancient monks' moshorleem," I made my way to the study.

My uncle had been very kind to me. I could not forget his saying—"Sophy, I will be your father; I have no child but you." I had therefore been at great pains to invent a little speech, so turned that I thought it could not possibly hurt his feelings, or make him think I was unhappy in his house. I repeated this little speech to myself several times, for fear I should not remember it at the right moment. And yet this is just what happened! When I found myself actually in the study, alone with Uncle Sherbrook, the speech went out of my head. I could think of nothing better to say than "Uncle Sherbrook, have . . . have you got a Bradshaw?" Even this I said awkwardly, blushing at each word.

To my unspeakable surprise and dismay, I saw Uncle Sherbrook understood what my question really meant. I intended to have led up to the subject

little by little. My uncle frowned, and pushing aside the blue paper he had been writing upon, leant over his desk, and looked at me without speaking. At first his look was all astonishment and indignation; then a grieved expression crossed his face, and I was sorry to see it.

I stammered out a few words; then stopped short, shocked to find I was on the very point of saying—"I would live with you, Uncle Sherbrook, only I am too unhappy—I feel worried to death." I stopped just in time, and mumbled these words instead—"You are very kind to me; I am very grateful; I will come back to you when I am in better spirits."

My uncle did not speak. I am no match for silent people—they frighten me. So I kept silence too.

Uncle Sherbrook replaced the sheet of foolscap in the middle of his desk, and began to write. I knew I ought to take the hint and go away, and still I sat on. He continued writing, but after a little I noticed the pen in his hand did not move.

"Sophy," he said at length, not looking up at me, but with his eyes fixed upon his desk—"Sophy, you . . . you have no ready money to spend on keeping house." There was unusual embarrassment in my uncle's manner. "Before you make any plans, you . . . well, Sophy, you had better speak to Mr Jones."

"Mr Jones? the attorney?" I exclaimed, greatly astonished, for I was under the impression Uncle Sherbrook shared Aunt Jane's prejudice against that Arian and Unitarian, the sacrilegious Jones.

"Jones was your mother's man of business," answered my uncle, laying aside his pen, and leaning back in his chair, as if disposed to talk. "He is acquainted with the true state of your affairs. I have consulted him about them since your mother's death, Sophy. I have had a few . . . one or two interviews, with Jones of late."

"Does . . . does Mr Jones come here regularly, as well as Mr Buggle?" I asked, wondering how many attorneys my uncle could accommodate in his study.

"Sophy," replied Uncle Sherbrook, hurriedly, "I have consulted Jones at his own house, but . . . you need not mention it to your Aunt Jane." My uncle then explained to me that it would be a slight on Mr Buggle were Mr Jones to be seen at Sherbrook Hall. "It is impossible, Sophy," he said, "for you to receive Jones here, as Buggle would feel insulted. He would think, and not without reason, that I had purposely disregarded the rules of professional etiquette. And were Buggle to take offence, I might perhaps find a difficulty in explaining matters to your aunt. Ladies are apt to see things in more than one light. They have a certain natural deficiency of reasoning power, which makes it a somewhat arduous task for their mind clearly to perceive the point of an argument. Buggle is a man of business esteemed by your aunt, and deservedly so—most deservedly so. You will therefore understand, Sophy, how it becomes impossible that I should make an appointment for you in this house with your mother's legal adviser. Yet, on

the other hand, I should not wish you to consult Jones in a manner which might be hurtful to the feelings of a professional man who, whatever his shortcomings may be, was for many years my agent and trusted adviser. I cannot forget that he and I fought and won our great case together." And my uncle almost smiled! I fancy he could not look back unmoved upon those ten pleasant years of right-of-way lawsuit.

Uncle Sherbrook, having reflected a moment in silence, said the bay mare was better than usual, and might, he thought, be taken out, so he proposed to order the carriage immediately, and send me in it, without further delay, to consult Mr Jones. "Jones," said he, "is always at home on Wednesday morning."

I thanked my uncle, and was leaving the room, when he called me back to say—"I understand your aunt is occupied down-stairs. There is no necessity for you to disturb her at present. The sooner you start, Sophy, the better."

The carriage had come to the door, and I was in it and just starting, when Uncle Sherbrook came running through the hall. Heavens! actually running! The bay mare is a roarer! thought I; but nothing of the sort. Uncle Sherbrook came to say a parting word. He put his head through the open window—"Nearer, Sophy," he said, "nearer!" and then in my ear—"I do not want Thomas to hear. Give this note to Jones. I am anxious to know if he agrees with Buggle on a point of some importance. Bring me back his answer."

And, whispering so low I could barely catch the words—"You need not mind telling your aunt I have consulted Jones."

For the first time since my mother's death, I laughed heartily. "I declare," cried I, "a Buggle three times a-week is not enough! Uncle Sherbrook would like a Jones and a Buggle day about!" I kept wondering all the way into Harefield why Uncle Sherbrook was sending me to see Mr Jones, and why I had not any ready money, and why, if Uncle Sherbrook knew I had not any, he did not tell me the reason himself. But if I wondered until I saw Mr Jones, I wondered much more before I left his office.

Old Jones had known me from a child. He seemed much pleased to see me arrive in all the glory of the Sherbrook family-coach, and at first he made so many inquiries about my own health, and so many about Uncle Sherbrook and his health, and was altogether so elaborately polite, that I thought we should never come to business.

However the time finally did arrive, when the old man benignantly said he presumed I wished to consult him about the state of my late lamented mother's affairs. Placing a solemn-looking leather arm-chair for me, he requested me to be seated. After a somewhat lengthy exordium, he told me Uncle Sherbrook had persuaded my mother to take shares in a bank to the amount of £100. This bank was under the enlightened management of an eminent philanthropist.

"You must have heard of this gentleman, Miss

Thursley," said Mr Jones. "He was an acquaintance — an intimate acquaintance — of Mr Buggle's. It was Mr Buggle who introduced him to your uncle, Mr Sherbrook. I need hardly say it was contrary to my advice that Mrs Thursley invested in this concern."

I remembered the man's name as that of a great Light who loved all men, particularly the blacks.

Shortly after my mother's death, it seems, this philanthropist had disappeared. The bank broke. Many poor people had shares in it; maiden ladies who believed black men were superior to white, perhaps because they had never heard of there being old maids in Africa; and clergymen, and widows of the clergy. There were also some rich shareholders, principally dissenters, whom the philanthropist had fascinated when he went on his annual collecting tour in aid of the establishment of an enlightened republic on the coast of Africa.

I was sure my mother would never have given her money into the hands of such a man, unless she had been bothered to do so; but she was easily worried into doing a thing. I had seen her teased into hemming pocket-handkerchiefs for Hottentots, and bothered into taking guinea tickets for concerts when she had no guineas to spare.

"Well, Mr Jones," I said, "after all, my mother had only £100 in this bank. When I go home I can be economical, and I will soon pay the money. I would send away the servants now, only I do not like parting

with old acquaintances; besides, I doubt if old John would let himself be sent away."

The pleasant, easy manner in which I spoke of my loss seemed to astound the attorney. "Miss Thursley," he exclaimed, "you appear to be labouring under some strange delusion. Is it possible you can bring yourself to imagine that gentlemen, whose own resources are not unlimited, would become managers of concerns where the liability is strictly limited to the sum invested?"

Mr Jones hereupon entered into a lengthy explanation of the difference between limited and unlimited liability. He made use of many legal terms, and diverged to "cases in point," and went into "apt illustrations of this matter," telling me to suppose A B had lodged money with C D. I thought the old man rather long-winded, so I began to look about the room and admire the wonderful caligraphy and red lines of a deed. Mr Jones's learned disquisition merely left on my mind the impression that, if any two letters of the alphabet lodge money with any other two, ruin comes of it.

I was afterwards sorry for my inattention, when I discovered my mother's old agent had been trying all this time to break bad news to me by means of A B's and C D's. At last my blind stupidity drove him to speak plainly, without either alphabet or law. He spoke in anger, as if put out at being forced to use ordinary English words. "The case is this," said he; "I will speak in monosyllables if I can, Miss Thursley

—if I can. The case is this. Mrs Thursley took two £50 shares in a bank where the liability was unlimited. Her whole fortune therefore became liable in case the bank broke. It did break. Do you understand me, Miss Thursley?—the bank broke. I hope I make my meaning sufficiently clear. It is rather plain English when banks take to breaking: Miss Thursley, they make their meaning pretty clear, I can tell you. It is not so difficult to understand you are a pauper when your whole fortune is gone. But in this case the entire fortune did not go. There being many rich shareholders who could pay up, the whole fortune did not go in this case,—Mrs Thursley only became liable to the extent of £12,000."

"Only £12,000," I cried; "only £12,000! Why, that is ruin! I am half-ruined, Mr Jones! And I must sell the house I am so fond of, where my mother and I lived together and were happy."

Mr Jones stood before me. He put his left hand into his waistcoat, and stretching out his right arm he exclaimed, with a theatrical gesture, "The money is paid, Miss Thursley—the money is paid!"

"Paid? How was it paid? Who paid it?"

"Your uncle."

"My uncle?"

"Your uncle—Mr Sherbrook of Sherbrook Hall."

"I cannot understand you," said I. The poor man let fall his two hands, and stared at me in mute astonishment. I hoped he would again repeat what he had said, and I was annoyed when he did not

speak. "You are silent, Mr Jones, so I do not believe my ears. I cannot believe what is impossible. Why," I asked—"why should my uncle do this thing when he is not a generous man?"

At last Mr Jones exclaimed: "Cannot you comprehend, Miss Thursley? It surely cannot be impossible for you to comprehend, Miss Thursley, that your uncle, Mr Sherbrook, paid the £12,000 in order that none of your property, and not even your house, might be sold."

"But why—why did he do so? What did he say?"

"Lord bless me, Miss Thursley!—why, he said he would not let any of your property be sold, as it was rising in value; and as to that small house of yours in London, why he said you would be sorry if it were sold. He said you were fond of your home."

"How did he know it? How could a man like Uncle Sherbrook know, Mr Jones," I asked, "that I am fond of that house? He never heard me say so."

"Lord bless me!" again exclaimed the attorney, "what questions ladies do ask. Lord bless me! but they do ask questions!"

I was altogether lost in wonder. After sitting silent for some minutes, I remember thinking I would go away; so I shook hands with Mr Jones and said, "When I have thanked my uncle, we will consider, Mr Jones, how I can repay this money."

The attorney stood in the doorway, and delivered himself of the following speech with such an air of

superiority to the rest of mankind, that I could not help thinking I was in some way under an obligation to him as well as to my uncle. "Mr Sherbrook," said he,—"Mr Sherbrook will never permit you to repay this money. Mr Sherbrook rarely gives, Miss Thursley; but when he does, he gives from principle—from principle! Mr Sherbrook thinks he persuaded Mrs Thursley to take shares in this bank: it is true he did persuade her to invest in this concern, being so advised by Mr Buggle. Mr Sherbrook has peculiar ideas of honour—ideas which are not shared by the majority of my clients. Mr Sherbrook was not bound in law to do what he has done, but he thought himself bound in honour; therefore he has acted generously from a high sense of honour and duty, and from a feeling of kindness. He will never change or take back what he has given. Should you propose to repay this money, you will insult him—Mr Sherbrook will feel insulted: I say it who should know him after fourteen years of professional intercourse—an intercourse which certain persons have interrupted for a time—for a time. Miss Thursley, I was your uncle's confidential man of business for fourteen years. My last interview with Mr Sherbrook convinced me he would again become my client,—my most esteemed client,—if he dared, if he dared. However, no more of this. Mr Sherbrook, when not the victim of intrigue, when not prejudiced by others, is a man of sound judgment; he is, moreover, a man of honour. Mr Sherbrook is an honourable man. Mr Sherbrook

did not desire you to know what he has done; he merely wished me to tell you that, for the present, you had no ready money. But I have thought it my duty to tell you the truth: yes, madam, I have told you because it is my duty towards Mr Sherbrook,—it is my duty to my late esteemed client to tell you how he has acted in this matter,—how nobly, how honourably, he has acted. Mr Sherbrook is a man of honour. As long as Mr Sherbrook has his wits about him, Miss Thursley, that Buggle will find it difficult to persuade him to do a mean action."

The tone of voice in which the one attorney and land-agent mentioned the other attorney and land-agent, caught my ear, and I suddenly remembered that an important point of law on which Mr Buggle had given his opinion, lay forgotten in my pocket.

I gave Mr Jones Uncle Sherbrook's letter. He betrayed intense satisfaction on receiving it, and read it with ill-concealed delight.

Mr Jones spent at least twenty minutes in scratching elaborate flourishes for Uncle Sherbrook's edification, and I certainly thought the legal composition looked worth 13s. 6d. I rose to leave.

"In a moment, Miss Thursley, in a moment!" said Mr Jones; "I fear I must detain you until I have sealed this letter. It is a private, it is a privileged communication between my late esteemed client and his old friend and confidential adviser. It may perhaps be somewhat contrary to the rules of professional etiquette, as it undoubtedly is beneath my dignity, to

give an opinion on a case which is in the hands of another solicitor. I do so entirely, entirely, in consideration of the unbroken professional intercourse which existed for fourteen years between Mr Sherbrook and myself. Pray excuse me, excuse me, Miss Thursley. It is not the easy matter you may imagine properly to affix a seal exactly in the middle of the sealing-wax."

Uncle Sherbrook could not have sealed a letter with greater solemnity.

This ceremony at an end, I bowed myself out of the room, and Mr Jones bowed me out of the house, through the little strip of garden into the carriage. After I had started, I looked back and saw Mr Jones standing on the county road, rolling his hands together, and bowing still.

CHAPTER IV.

THOMAS told Snipkins, Snipkins told Aunt Jane, that I had been to see Mr Jones.

Mr Buggle, passing through Harefield, had seen the Sherbrook carriage waiting at Mr Jones's door. Mr Buggle had complained of this crying scandal to Aunt Jane, and my aunt had told him it was not her fault but Sophy's. "And, Sophy, Mr Buggle was very, very angry with you, and indeed he was so angry, I was quite frightened, for I was afraid he would be angry with me. And Mr Buggle said he would never forgive you, Sophy—and I am sure he won't—and I think he is quite right, because you have insulted him by consulting a man like Mr Jones." Aunt Jane was very indignant at the insult I had offered Mr Buggle.

Uncle Sherbrook said, "Jane, what is done cannot be undone." These impressive words, and the seriousness of my uncle's manner, overawed my aunt for the time being, but afterwards she only talked on this subject the more. Uncle Sherbrook

did not walk with us on the front avenue for several afternoons, so Aunt Jane's anger flowed unchecked.

I said "Indeed," from time to time, but only just listened sufficiently to discover that my aunt knew nothing of the true state of my affairs. It was evident the £12,000 had not been mentioned to her. I thought perhaps Uncle Sherbrook did not wish Mr Buggle to know what he and Mr Jones had done; and what Aunt Jane knew, Mr Buggle would surely learn to know. Or else, I thought, it might be that some delicate instinct hidden away with other fine feelings in my uncle's silent heart, made him dread the publicity his wife would give his generosity, and revealed to him that she would harp aloud upon this good action, as if it were a cook or the bonnet of a Christian, while Snipkins would say *Amen*, and a great deal besides.

Uncle Sherbrook avoided me. I imagined he was afraid I might give him Mr Jones's letter in my aunt's presence.

Five whole days passed before I had an opportunity of speaking to my uncle. Aunt Jane was in so many places at once, and in the study at all times! She let out to me that Snipkins had told her I was "getting round" Uncle Sherbrook, and would soon undermine the wife's rightful influence, and Mr Buggle's also.

At last, by good luck, Aunt Jane's crape flounce caught in the handle of a door. Her "deepest" crape

flounce! It was torn to ribbons. I saw the accident, but as my aunt did not see me, I fled rejoicing, and left her to scream alone for Snipkins.

I ran to the study, and went in with a breeze which sent a blue-buggle flying across the room.

Startled solemnity was on every feature of Uncle Sherbrook's face; his astonished eyes followed the blue-buggle.

"Uncle Sherbrook," I said, taking his hand and clasping it in my two hands, "you have been nobly generous to me." My uncle was silent. "Thank you for your unspoken kindness, Uncle Sherbrook. Twelve thousand pounds is a large sum to give, and to give in silence." He did not speak. "Speak!" I implored, "speak! or I cannot thank you as I wish."

I expected at least to see some expression in his face which would tell me he knew what I meant. Could I have mistaken Mr Jones? And yet my uncle left his hand in mine, and did not try to take it from me or motion me away, or even tell me to shut the door I had left open.

His silence had its usual paralysing effect on my tongue. I found it hard to speak again.

At length Uncle Sherbrook spoke. "Sophy," he said, "you are inaccurate. Inaccuracy is the besetting sin of a woman's mind."

What a queer beginning! thought I.

"Sophy," continued my uncle, "in the matter I presume you refer to, I did not consider my liabilities

extended beyond £11,900. I considered it just and proper that your mother and her heir or heirs should be liable to the extent of the sum invested."

At these words all doubt disappeared from my mind; I believed what the attorney had told me. The paltry sum withheld by the outstretched hand was the sign by which I knew my uncle's generosity was no myth, but a real fact. It was like that little cock to the nose which some men and women have, but angels have not. I felt it had cost my uncle an effort to give this money; I felt this, so I admired him,—I admired him more than if he had acted from mere impulse.

Much moved by his great kindness, and still holding his hand, I said, "Uncle Sherbrook, you have indeed been like a father to me, so I will be like a daughter to you."

When I said this, my uncle bent forward and gravely kissed me—for the second time in my life. There was silence between us.

When Uncle Sherbrook spoke again, he said, and rather testily, "Sophy, shut the door. Pick up Mr Buggle's letter, and replace it on my desk."

I obeyed his commands. My uncle pointed to a chair opposite his own, and telling me to sit down, asked me if Mr Jones had not given me a letter for him? I gave my uncle the attorney's sealed envelope, and rose to leave. To my surprise, I was requested to remain seated.

Uncle Sherbrook examined the unopened letter. "Yes,

this is Jones's writing," he said; "I know it well.' He then repeated what he had said to me the other day. "Whatever Jones's shortcomings may have been, I cannot forget that he and I fought and won our great case together.

Being willing to please him, I said, "Indeed, Uncle Sherbrook, that was an important case, for it seems to have settled the knottiest point of law ever disputed by landlord and tenant."

"Sophy," remarked my uncle, "it was not a point of law which merely concerned a landlord and a tenant. The dispute was one likely to arise between every landowner in the United Kingdom and every peasant (not necessarily a tenant of the landowner's), and every vagabond, gipsy, wayfarer, farmer, shopkeeper, or proprietor, not necessarily neighbours of the landowner's, although more probably neighbours than strangers residing at a distance. If neighbours and also tenants (as in my case), the trespass would in all likelihood be more frequent, and the nuisance would consequently be the greater; but the point at issue would remain the same in either case. It was a simple question of right-of-way."

"Oh, but Uncle Sherbrook!" I cried, "how could it have been a simple one, when the whole United Kingdom was at law? Landlords, landowners, tenants, and peasants not necessarily tenants, wayfarers, shopkeepers, farmers, and neighbours, and proprietors not necessarily neighbours of the landowner's, and even the very vagabonds and gipsies, all fighting at the

same time! Why, it was the most complicated case I ever heard of."

"Sophy," said my uncle, "you are not altogether deficient in mental capacity. I have known ladies more deficient than you; you should, therefore, be able to apprehend the fact that in a case where there are many and various interests at stake, there yet may only be one point at issue."

Uncle Sherbrook opened Mr Jones's letter. I got up to go away, and again my uncle bade me stay. He read the letter slowly, and having read it once, began to read it a second time. I got up. "Sit down, Sophy!" he exclaimed angrily; "you distract my attention, so that I do not grasp the point of Jones's argument."

And Uncle Sherbrook read the letter a third time. He then took up the blue-buggle I had placed on his desk, and read that too.

I was growing desperate.

At length my uncle stopped reading. He leant back in his arm-chair, crossed his legs, and held up Mr Jones's letter in his right hand and Mr Buggle's in his left. He looked from one legal document to the other; then he looked at me, and with such an air of serious preoccupation, that I almost thought he must be going to pass sentence of death upon me in accordance with the well-considered advice of Jones and Buggle. But really had my uncle condemned me to be hung by the neck till I was dead, I do not think I should have been much more astonished than I was

to hear him say what he did. This was the speech he made me: "Sophy, I have consulted Jones and Buggle on a matter of importance. Buggle gave me his advice,"—he looked at his left hand—"Jones has given me his,"—he looked at his right one—"and yet it is a strange fact that their advice is diametrically opposed on every point at issue. They only agree in each one advising me to take a first-rate London opinion, but Jones recommends one barrister and Buggle another." And now came the astounding part of my uncle's oration: "Sophy, I purpose reading you Jones's letter, and I will also read you Buggle's. You will then tell me in what light the matter strikes you, for the opinion of a perfectly ignorant person is not always to be despised. Listen to me attentively, and carefully separate in your own mind the more important from the less important points. Not that I would have you imagine," he added gravely, "that any point is unimportant."

I hardly knew how to keep from smiling. The idea of my being asked to sit in judgment on Jones and Buggle! I was amused, but I soon got dreadfully bored. However, I did not yawn; I listened patiently, thinking perhaps I could never find a better way of pleasing Uncle Sherbrook and of showing him my gratitude.

Having read Mr Buggle's letter aloud, my uncle gave a lengthy disquisition on the real "points at issue." Finally he said, "Sophy you are mistress of the facts. It may now be well for you to hear and

to consider the advice—the contradictory advice—given me by Jones."

Uncle Sherbrook had read half through Mr Jones's letter, when the door opened; and with all the majesty of an injured woman, in walked Aunt Jane——and her upper lip!

My aunt turned an angry, jealous eye upon me. I understood her look. Stifling a yawn, I smiled to think any one could envy me the privilege of being infinitely bored.

Uncle Sherbrook's nervousness surprised me. He thrust Mr Jones's letter into his desk, and then trying to lock the desk, turned the key round and round. He signed to me to go away. I slipped behind Aunt Jane. Her lips were open; the gold was pouring out. I shut the door hurriedly, for fear I should hear what she was saying, and find she wanted me to stay. Then I ran as if for my life.

Aunt Jane did not speak to me for many days. Her silence would have been a comfort had she not sighed perpetually, and groaned and wept.

When at length Aunt Jane spoke again, I discovered, to my amazement, that she had good reason to be jealous of me, for Uncle Sherbrook had praised my common-sense and legal acumen. Doubtless my uncle was unaware I had only listened while he had spoken, and remembering many wise things were said, forgot he himself had said them.

Aunt Jane could make Uncle Sherbrook feel uncomfortable when she was jealous, so that her jealousy,

though trying to me in many ways, was not an unmixed evil, as it preserved me from frequent visits to the study. I have no taste for the law. Had I given my uncle the slightest encouragement, he would have consulted me frequently. If ever I was alone with him for a minute, he fumbled in his pocket, and told me I was not entirely deficient in mental capacity. "But Aunt Jane would not like it," I would say, answering his meaning and not his words. I would hear the crumpling of a paper, and Uncle Sherbrook would take his hand out of his pocket, and say no more.

I allowed Uncle Sherbrook to manage my affairs. I told him he might do what he liked with my money; that I would trust him implicitly, and never ask a question. I knew nothing I could do or say would please him more. He said this proof of my confidence gave him great satisfaction, and thenceforth he saw Mr Jones every Monday, and, for all I know, he may have written to him besides. He visited "Sophy's confidential man of business" openly and in state, and for one day in the week seemed to forget the bay mare was a roarer.

From this time my uncle's lower jaw grew permanently shorter than it used to be. The fact is, he was leading a gay life—a life gay with the one sort of gaiety he cared for. He was dancing backwards and forwards from Buggle to Jones, and from Jones to Buggle, and from my property to his property. He became so lively (for him) that I should have thought

he was making another will, only Aunt Jane lived more out of the study than in it; and she hardly ever left the sacred room while Uncle Sherbrook made his will. He had taught her to enjoy the importance and secrecy of such a delectable solemnity; and besides, it was an event.

My aunt and I were consequently thrown together more than ever. Aunt Jane expected me to lead exactly the life she led herself, and to do nothing on earth, almost to think nothing, but what she did and thought herself. Oh, the loneliness of living morning, noon, and night with a person who has no originality, who bores you, and is no companion to you! There are two kinds of solitude. They are both sad; but I found the worst, a thousand times the worst, is not to be alone by yourself, but alone with another person. Oh, the wretchedness of being imprisoned in one narrow round of small thoughts and petty worries, like some young fleet hound chained by a wearying collar to one hole in a wall! The desolation of living without new ideas! Those only who have never felt the pain of starvation can wonder others are driven to despair by hunger. There is many a woman, I am sure, imprisoned in some one else's narrow life, as I was in Aunt Jane's, who suffers from the wasted powers of her own young life, as from a disease slowly driving her to despair by hunger of the heart and mind. But it would seem a woman's life is not her own. When she gives it up to others, she gets no thanks for the gift. Aunt Jane

had greedily taken possession of my life, yet she gave me no thanks in return. If she had stolen my mother's diamond ring from my finger, she would have thought she had committed a sin. As if I loved a ring with all my soul! But she could steal my time, my mind, my very life from me, and never know remorse. Her vacant mind lived on the mind of others. My mind was hers—my life! It is cruel, it is maddening to be robbed of life, and to feel that time is passing like a wave which leaves no mark upon the sand.

I seemed to have lived years since my mother's death; I had lost all clear consciousness of time. There were days when I thought I could no longer force myself to stay on at Sherbrook Hall,—when I hated Aunt Jane, and felt as if she were setting me mad. Mad? The idea filled me with horror; I turned from it, and dared not dwell upon it, for it seemed so likely that I might indeed go mad. I hated Sherbrook. Although my uncle was kind to me, his affection was not one that warmed the heart and satisfied it, and I was never quite at ease with him. I hated the whole place, and the front avenue, and the back one even worse than the front. I dreaded the tedious evening, and the long ceremony of dinner, lengthened expressly for the training of Thomas! I hated the very bells in the house, and the irritating needless punctuality, and the solemnity all about nothing, and the minute particularity, and the Commentary. I though I could live with people's faults

if Heaven preserved me from their best virtues, for they are proud of their irritating virtues, and do not hide them like their faults. It was the Sherbrooks' narrow virtues I found so teasing.

But when this hatred of Sherbrook Hall, and of the life I led there, would passionately seize me, my conscience would give me pain, for I well knew there was only one way in which I could make Uncle Sherbrook feel I was grateful to him. If I went away from his house, and left him to spend his evenings alone with Aunt Jane, or to be tatted at by the admirable Catherine, he would surely feel I had paid him with an empty speech, and not with a daughter's gratitude.

Hitherto I had thought I had a very grateful heart, and in this I think I was like most people; for, whereas I have noticed few believe in the gratitude of others, I have not heard any one call himself ungrateful. I detested ingratitude in other people, and used to be quite sure, if any one ever did me a kindness, I should take a lively pleasure in making that person feel I thanked him. And yet it was I who now found gratitude a hard bondage!

Let no one be deceived; it is not always easy to be grateful. Because, if we would satisfy our conscience and our heart, we must not coldly reason, or only choose the pleasant open paths of easy gratitude. We must rather follow our instinct, like the noble dog, who never forsakes a friend, but leaps with joy upon the pompous bore, upon the wretched, the sinful, the poor—or, far worse, the vulgar—man. I was grieved to find it is

not easy to be grateful, unless we can be so in our own way; and I changed my opinion of my own heart, and no longer thought it naturally a grateful one.

At last, after many struggles and many yawns, I did settle I would live on at Sherbrook Hall with my aunt and uncle just for the present. I could not bear to think I should live there long. It was not reason or sense told me to stay, but instinct which persuaded my heart against its will. I felt I was only doing my duty to the old people by remaining with them, and I knew I should be very selfish if I went away.

I will allow there is a certain satisfaction in doing your duty; only, unfortunately, it does not prevent your being infinitely bored. I wish it did! There were times when I would have patience with Aunt Jane: I would have pity, and then my feelings towards her were not unkind. At heart I had the sort of affection for her we have for those who have corrected us incessantly in childhood, and bored us from our earliest youth. It is a very peculiar kind of affection, and yet perhaps it is one after all.

But there was a thought which would come to me in the dulness and aching void of my life, and be the best, the only real comforter I ever had. "There is death," I would think, "awaiting each one of us; and he is not so far off, after all. I may yawn a little now, but I know he is there. If I just lift up my eyes and look beyond the present tediousness, I can see him. And I am glad to see him, for my beloved stands by his side. I might be sorry to think of dying

if I were very cheerful here, laughing with some kindly witty fellow, and satisfied with life. This present time is short to pass without our merry joke, and we who are condemned to die should not care so much to laugh; it is better for us to think a little while we have time." So I did think; and such thoughts take the fidgets from impatience, and calm discontent. And they have a sort of joy of their own; but it is not a lively, laughing, arguing one.

While brooding in this way, I would forget to smile at the little things which used to make a laughing mocker of me in my uncle's house. I did not care to "argue" with Aunt Jane, but just said "Indeed!" and little more.

My aunt thought me a wonderfully improved character, and considered "Sophy's regeneration" was entirely due to the Commentary. She actually said to me one morning, on the back avenue, "I declare, Sophy, you are becoming quite an amiable person." This was the first compliment Aunt Jane had ever paid me, but it did not turn my head. I knew that in a nature like mine striking amiability is merely the effect of low spirits. It pleased Aunt Jane to think she and Dr MacShaw had killed the "old Adam" within me. So they had. But oh, that old Adam! at least he was lively!

CHAPTER V.

The measles had no sooner begun to disappear from the Rectory than the whooping-cough took possession of that unlucky household. I should have liked to go and see poor Mary Sherbrook, and help her to nurse that pack of sick children; but when I proposed it to Aunt Jane, I thought she would get both measles and whooping-cough from sheer fright, since they were in the air.

I myself should not have minded getting the whooping-cough—it would have been something to do; and whenever I heard Aunt Jane or Snipkins coming near me, I might have whooped and sent them ambling in the opposite direction. I should have whooped for at least three months.

Except Mary and the Rector, we had no kind friendly neighbours. The Rigardy-Wrenstones were unfortunately our nearest ones, and they were not friendly people. We had seen nothing of them since my mother's death. It is true I had received a letter of condolence from Denis at the time. I have it still. This was it:—

"DUMBLEDORE, 10*th Sept.*

"DEAR SOPHY,—You are, I believe, aware that I managed to attend your mother's funeral, although I did not hear of the loss you had sustained before the Tuesday after my aunt's death. I was pre-engaged to shoot Castletower's woods with the Prince and Furley, but Castletower, at great inconvenience to himself, most kindly made arrangements for me to catch the early train, so that I was enabled to be present at the ceremony. I need hardly say it gave me much pleasure to pay this tribute of respect to the memory of one for whom I must ever entertain feelings of affection.

"Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is out driving with the Duchess, or, I feel sure, would send her kind regards. Pray give mine to the Sherbrooks, and believe me, very truly yours, RIGARDY-WRENSTONE."

To this letter, with the peer's signature, I had replied :—

"DEAR RIGARDY-WRENSTONE,—I am sorry you did not shoot with the Prince of Wales and Lord Furley, and I regret that Lord Castletower was put to inconvenience, for I fear the dead do not care who goes to their funeral, or who stays away and shoots. I rather imagine it is the remembrance of affection and gratitude shown to them while still they were living, which they carry beyond the grave.

"Should Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone have returned from

her drive with the Duchess, pray give her my kind regards.—Believe me, yours truly,

"SOPHY THURSLEY."

The Rigardy-Wrenstones spent the month of February at the Abbey. We used to meet them at church, but they were so occupied entertaining the Dumbledores, Castletowers, Furleys, and Tuttertons, that they never came to see us. Denis followed Lady Offaway's example, and thought it fashionable not to patronise the "Aborigines."

Our only other near neighbours were the Tankneys. Tank Court is barely three miles from Sherbrook Hall, so it was a sad pity that "queer people" lived there. When ladies said Lord Tankney was "not a very nice man," they meant he was a very wicked one. He had been a bad husband in his younger days. His wife had been obliged to separate from him; and, since her death, he had married the opera-singer who was the cause of the quarrel. Lord Tankney's only son, though said by some people to be heir to the fortune, cannot inherit the title.

The whole county had taken the former Lady Tankney's part. Pretty Clara Moultrie had been a popular Dullshire beauty once upon a time, before she married Lord Tankney. She continued to be popular while mistress of Tank Court. When Lady Tankney was forced to leave her husband's house, it was said in the county, "No one goes to Tank Court," yet the house was never known to be empty.

The constant visitors were said to come down from London. Wherever they came from, they arrived in numbers. Harefield often had the excitement of seeing three coroneted waggonettes, full of gay ladies or actresses and gentlemen, on their way to his "Lordship's." And what a rate they went at! As a child, when I asked questions about these delightfully dashing waggonettes, I got evasive answers from my mother, and scandalised looks, but no words, from Aunt Jane. My aunt's miraculous silence was in itself an awful mystery! So I grew up to think Lord Tankney's waggonettes were driving post-haste to the infernal regions. I remember their rushing past us one day while Robert was walking our horses up the Simplon. I declare, thought I, I should like to go to hell, if only I went there full gallop! I well recollect thinking this. I teased Aunt Jane with many questions. She put on her most severe air of propriety, and bade me be quiet; then she pulled down the upper lip, and kept her mouth tightly closed, for fear a word might slip out unawares. She eased her over-burdened powers by heaving deep sighs. Tank Court was the only subject on which I ever knew Aunt Jane prevail with her tongue to keep silence. The wickedness of such a household struck my good aunt dumb. Later in life, when I knew what injury it was Lord Tankney had done his poor wife, I liked my aunt all the better for her hatred of this man's sin. The one point I admired in the two Sherbrooks was their clear

idea of right and wrong. They might think things wicked that were not very wrong, but they never thought what was wrong was right.

Uncle Sherbrook had deep reverence for the holiness of married life. Lord Tankney's conduct outraged this feeling, and offended his pride: he considered the bad life led by the largest landed proprietor in West Dullshire lessened the respect the "masses" should feel for all great landowners.

Then, too, my uncle had been one of pretty Clara Moultrie's admirers, and had danced with her at two county balls before he went into the Church. Fancy Uncle Sherbrook dancing! I asked him if it could be true he had ever danced? He reddened, and said Yes. What strangely different human beings the two Sherbrooks must have been before they grew old and became "awakened"!

My uncle sat on the bench beside Lord Tankney for twenty years, and, I believe, never spoke to him. When business required the neighbours to speak, I am told they spoke to Jack Jones. Denis used to say they had old Jack put into the commission of the peace for that very purpose. My cousin loved to declare Lord Tankney did not care a straw whether Uncle Sherbrook cut him or not; but my uncle firmly believed he did care.

Lord Tankney is the only very great county magnate who spends six months of the year in Dullshire. Lord Offaway, "the Marquis," as he is called, has a place in Scotland, and a hunting-box in Leicester-

shire. The Marchioness rides well to hounds, though she is not as young as she used to be. Lady Offaway is positively obliged to go to Cowes every summer, as she cannot exist without six weeks yachting after the London season. When the shooting is over in Scotland, the Offaways spend a month at Manyfields. They also come there in the spring on their way to town, if not engaged in visiting elsewhere. Lord Offaway is supposed to like Dullshire, as his father did before him; but my lady has been heard to exclaim more than once in the presence of "county people," that Manyfields may be well enough in its way, but that positively the neighbourhood is quite too more than awful! for there is not a soul one would care to speak to! now positively there is not!

So the house which fifteen years ago entertained the gentry for miles around, is filled with "people one meets in town." If the "Aborigines" are asked to dine, it is said they are not introduced to the party staying in the house, unless they happen to be amusing Aborigines, "quite too more than original." They are then introduced to be laughed at.

Uncle Sherbrook used to be very intimate with the "late man," as the last dead marquis is termed.

Some years ago my uncle and Aunt Jane were invited to dine at Manyfields. The bay mare had not then become a roarer, and the Sherbrooks were younger, so they undertook the ten miles' drive. Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup, Lady Offaway's tame cat, was specially introduced to Uncle Sherbrook by my

lady—perhaps she considered her elderly guest "quite too more than original." I never could make out what really took place. Aunt Jane cannot tell a clear story. You must know the facts before she begins her tale, to understand or even to remember them afterwards. All I can say is, that Uncle Sherbrook never went to Manyfields again, and refused several invitations to go there.

The year before I went to live at Sherbrook Hall, Lord Flashdash, the Offaways' eldest son, came of age, and stood for the county. He was ignominiously defeated by Mr Frank Moultrie, Sir John's eldest son. The Moultries are hospitable people at all times; besides they fill their house for the county ball, and give a ball themselves during the "hunt week."

Each year the Moultries invited the Sherbrooks to spend three days of this "hunt week" at the Grange. My uncle and aunt considered it a compliment to be invited, and Aunt Jane would, I am sure, have felt aggrieved had she been forgotten. Yet for some years the Sherbrooks had annually refused the invitation; and solely because they happened to have fallen out of the habit of going anywhere, or of putting themselves out in any way for the sake of society. They were people who would have liked society to come to them, if it came easily, without any trouble; but who never sought society, or cared to drive those precious horses visiting beyond Votlingham.

Uncle Sherbrook would meet the county gentlemen

when he went in to Votlingham on business, and at election dinners, and on the grand jury; but this was only now and then. He rarely met any one on the magisterial bench but Lord Tankney, to whom he did not speak, or else Rigardy-Wrenstone. I used often to think it was a pity my uncle had been a clergyman in the days of his youth, before his elder brother died, as for ever after, having sound views, he thought it was wrong for him to hunt or shoot. His white neckcloth, in keeping him from the hunting-field, cast him out of the ideas and familiar society of other gentlemen. So every year he lived more and more shut up with his own peculiarities and Aunt Jane's. The Snipkins family became unaccustomed to see people invited to dine and sleep.

The year of my mother's death, Aunt Jane refused the Moultries annual invitation on the blackest-edged paper.

Some months afterwards, Lady Moultrie, kindly saying a little change must be good for me, invited me to spend a few days at the Grange. I was not told of this invitation until Aunt Jane had refused it. My aunt said I was still in deep mourning; besides, she told me she did not approve of too much gaiety for young people. She thought it better they should lead a quiet life—the sort of life she imagined herself to have led at my age. Now I know she visited about, and danced, and even went to theatres in her youth; but she had forgotten it these thirty years! Old people do forget

their youth, and there is no miracle like this one! Aunt Jane said if I went to the Moultries, perhaps the young people might insist on dancing in the evening while I was there—"for I know Lady Moultrie lets her sons and daughters do what they like, and one of the sons is a flirting officer; but Edward will not hear a word against any member of that family, and he is always meeting Sir John on the grand jury, and I declare Edward dotes upon him, and I almost think he really must have been slightly in love long ago with his sister Clara, before she married Lord Tankney. It is quite ridiculous; and Snipkins says if the Moultries lived nearer, we should never have Sir John out of the house."

Aunt Jane being "awakened," and past sixty, perfectly agreed with the author of 'Captain Apollyon,' and was persuaded flirting officers and frivolous young ladies *danced downwards*. My aunt also considered half the silly matches between "young people who did not know their own minds" would never take place if there were no parties in country houses and no dancing. Perhaps not. Sensible marriages undoubtedly come from flirting over commentaries in after-life. A lady cannot make a sensible match like Aunt Jane's till she is thirty-nine; and no truly Christian gentleman is infallible, or has a confirmed liver complaint, before he is forty.

I had not lived long at Sherbrook Hall before I put away my youth, like a fine dress I should never wear again. If I hoped visitors might come, it was

merely because I thought they would listen to Aunt Jane, and give her new ideas and new grievances, and be themselves a new subject to talk of. It was very difficult to amuse Aunt Jane. I could do little to please her but say "Indeed!" and wonder six times a-day if Catherine would stay away for ever, and if Gordon-Sherbrook's lung was really any better!

This young man's lung became a fertile field of wonder to my aunt. The best of women was also the best of mothers. The letters in which she expressed her maternal feelings were Scriptural compositions, which edified my aunt and puzzled her at the same time. The dear, excellent, indefatigable creature "rejoiced in the Lord," and was delighted to say her precious Gordon-Sherbrook never felt better in his life. It was no longer his health which kept her away from Riverbank; she would return that very hour if she could find it in her heart to leave the good work she was now engaged in. She had collected £40, 6s. 3½d. for the Promotion of the Blessed Christian Sabbath Rest in the Homes of Postmen, and must collect £15 more.

"Or there would be nothing left for the charity," I remarked.

"Sophy, you don't seem to understand what Catherine means!" exclaimed my aunt; "but I daresay you were not really listening." So Aunt Jane read me out the whole of Catherine's letter again.

"How comes Mrs Stewart," I asked, "to be 'rejoicing in the Lord,' as she terms it, over her son's

recovery, when Dr Daly tells Uncle Sherbrook the young man is spitting blood, and never can be strong again?"

Here indeed was a mystery! a mine of interminable wonderings! Aunt Jane wrote to Mrs Stewart, and again received the same excellent account of Gordon-Sherbrook's health.

Surely there cannot be two sides to a lung?

I grew so dead sick of Gordon-Sherbrook's lung, that I was quite glad when at Easter Rigardy-Wrenstone's head groom, Ned Sparks, told Robert Jones, who told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane, that "his people" were at the Abbey, and had no company staying in the house. I hoped they would come and see Aunt Jane, and drive Gordon-Sherbrook's lung out of her mind. My aunt expected a visit from her only brother's only son,—if not from him, certainly from his wife. Every day for a whole week, I could see she looked forward to this event (because it would be an event) with pleasure, and a black-bordered handkerchief. However, the Rigardy-Wrenstones did not go to the trouble of calling. My aunt could hardly believe her ears when she heard they had gone back to town; but she had to believe at last, for the news came to us on the best authority—it was again Ned Sparks who told Robert Jones, who told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane.

Ned Sparks's veracity was moreover confirmed by the 'Morning Post.' My aunt never failed to read the names of the people who went to the drawing-

rooms and levees. Such literature was certainly not of an atheistical tendency. Aunt Jane did not merely lay these lists upon her knee and go to sleep, she really read them. She was pleased when she recognised acquaintances, and would read out their names, and tell me who they were and whom they had married, and whom their sons had married, and if their daughters were strictly brought up, and whom these girls were to have married and did not marry, and to whom they were married in the end. All this valuable information was doubtless interesting, but might have been more so had I ever seen the people who married and did not marry in such hopeless confusion. One morning there was a levee-list in the 'Post,' and really I thought breakfast would never end. Aunt Jane had been intermarrying a whole set of names for nearly an hour, when of a sudden she stopped; so I said "Indeed!" But she did not go on again. I looked at her to see if anything was the matter, and found her gazing at me with an air of mingled disappointment and anger. I said "Indeed!" a second time, fearing she might think me a careless audience.

"Well, Sophy," exclaimed my aunt—"well, I do declare you were paying no attention whatever to me. The Rigardy-Wrenstones have really gone to town, and without calling here!—for Denis was at the levee, and I have read out his name twice over to you, and I expected you would be astonished, but you were not!"

I took the 'Morning Post,' but made no apology, fearing my aunt would cry if I confessed that I had not been listening to her. At first I could not see my cousin's name anywhere; then I found I had looked for it instinctively amongst the dukes and marquesses. So I cast down my eye to the "Messieurs," and there it was! but put in like the name of a conceited Scotchman, who fears the world will never know he has a country place. I found *Rigardy-Wrenstone (Harefield Abbey)*. "Yes, that is he," said I; "and he has certainly put this in himself. So the Rigardy-Wrenstones must be in town, Aunt Jane." Here, indeed, was conclusive evidence on a very important point. Oh, the important events of life, how important they are!

Towards the end of July Ned Sparks again told Robert Jones, who told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane, the Rigardy-Wrenstones had arrived at the Abbey.

Not very long afterwards my cousin's wife paid us a visit.

"How do you do, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?" said Aunt Jane, rising, handkerchief in hand, to meet the visitor who had just been announced. "I hope you are quite well."

"Thankee!" answered Jumping Georgy, and astonished my aunt by kissing her instead of waiting to be kissed,—as if she, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, were a greater lady than Aunt Jane. She had jumped brusquely into the room; she now remained standing still, with her eye-glass fixed in her eye.

"It is some time since we met," remarked Aunt Jane in a weeping voice. "Time and life and death move onwards, and man is but a flower of the field."

There came no reply to this broad hint. What could Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone be thinking of, not to perceive my aunt longed for a few words of melancholy and condolence? I rejoiced at her blindness.

"Will you take a chair, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?" said I; and I shook hands with her, for she had forgotten to shake hands with me.

"Thankee!" she said, and seated herself suddenly, almost alarmingly, for you feared the chair might break.

There was silence.

"I hope my nephew is well?" asked Aunt Jane.

"Yes, thankee," said her niece.

Then came another dead stop.

There was something about the Drill-Sergeant which, on first meeting her and her eye-glass, shortened Aunt Jane's breath, and took away her wonderful power of easy transition. I actually felt called upon to make a remark.

"I wonder if we shall have another open winter this year as we had last?" (No answer.) "It was exactly the weather for hunting." (No answer.) "I suppose there were some capital runs?" (No answer.) "You are fond of riding, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, are you not?"

"I like it," said she.

When I drew forth these three words, I felt like a

dentist who has extracted three teeth, and I thought I would rest a little before the next operation. Aunt Jane, seeing my success, began to speak. Her own voice reassured her. Having made a good start, she talked on. Once off, her tongue can turn on its own axis. I imagine my aunt did not long perceive that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone remained silent.

Though Jumping Georgy had not a word to say herself, she soon grew tired of my aunt's conversation. Being a dashing light dragoon, and by no means one of those well-trained pieces of heavy cavalry who can sit silent for hours in uncomplaining majesty, she took no trouble to conceal her feelings. She raised her eye-glass, looked at everything in the room, then jumped up suddenly, and declared she must be off. Aunt Jane was startled, and, losing the thread of her discourse, found herself without a word.

I felt rested by this time, so I asked Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone if I should inquire for her carriage. "Thankee," said she, and I did so.

There was silence once more.

I stared out of the window, and was glad to see a black cloud, for it suggested a remark. I said, "It looks like rain. Can I lend you a cloak, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?"

"Thankee! no," said she; "don't mind the rain."

Thomas announced the carriage just as my aunt began again to recover the use of her tongue. "Good-bye!" said Aunt Jane. "Pray give my kind regards to Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone."

"Thankee!" replied my cousin's wife. She winced a little, for Aunt Jane's upper lip had laid marked emphasis on "Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone." Jumping Georgy left the room in a greater hurry than she had entered it.

My aunt liked to discuss this visit every day for a week, in the morning on the back avenue, and in the afternoon on the front one.

I only said, "Indeed!" What else could I say on such a sterile subject, except to remark that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone made great use of the word "Thankee," and very little use of any other?

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's short manner hurt Aunt Jane. Her clean-cut *Thankees!* were a sharp instrument, killing illusion like cold steel, and thrusting back into your heart all hope of soft friendship and sympathy.

Still who can believe it? Aunt Jane had so few people to visit, that she was quite in a fuss to call at the Abbey. Uncle Sherbrook said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had taken her time to call on Aunt Jane, so that Aunt Jane might call on Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone at her leisure. My uncle always ordered the carriage: this was his prerogative. He and Robert Jones were the only two people on earth who knew if the bay mare happened to be well or ill.

Aunt Jane was longing to find the Wrenstones at home, for she had never been inside the Abbey since her nephew's marriage, and she had heard the drawing-room was newly furnished, after a perfectly strange

fashion and in very queer colours, and with two oddly-shaped looking-glasses, all set round with blue china kitchen-plates. Her curiosity was intense; but she "argued" in vain with my uncle. He insisted upon only ordering the carriage when he pleased.

The Wrenstones' London *not-at-homes* irritated Uncle Sherbrook, and their assumption of superiority to the ordinary rules of good manners in country parts awakened the spirit of contrariety within him. Had the Rigardy-Wrenstones invented their fine airs themselves, I do not think Uncle Sherbrook would have minded them; for he thought Jumping Georgy bad style, and had an intense contempt for Denis, of whom he used to say, "That peer of the realm boasts as if he were an upstart whose ancestors had never spoken to a gentleman." But the Wrenstones invented nothing,—they only copied the mistress of Manyfields. Lady Offaway filled her house with *people one meets in town*, and would be civil to no *Aborigines* except the clergyman and his wife—fine ladies always do patronise the clergy. My uncle considered Lady Offaway the most ill-bred woman he had ever met, and was quite determined *he* would not give in to any of the airs and fashions she might set in Dullshire.

It was certainly rather funny Jumping Georgy should think the Marchioness of Offaway a model of good style, and offend her neighbours, and patronise no Aborigines but the Rector and Mary Sherbrook; and it was all the more strange because Lady Offaway

had been rude to the Rigardy-Wrenstones, and had never as yet taken the slightest notice of them.

When at length, at the end of a full month, my uncle allowed Aunt Jane to return her niece's visit, he ordered the carriage on one of those days when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was supposed not to be at home: Aunt Jane would rather the bay mare had coughed that day and been well the next. For my part, I was glad the precious animal felt in good health on one of those days when the Drill-Sergeant did not hold a parade for the Aborigines. I had no wish to meet Denis; I thought he had been ungrateful and cold-hearted to my poor mother, and I knew she had felt his ingratitude; therefore it rather pained me to think of seeing him,—and as to his wife, she startled me and scattered my senses.

So I drove to the Abbey with Aunt Jane in a quiet frame of mind. My happy state was a little disturbed as we came near the house, for I saw Denis leaning out of the drawing-room window, and talking to quite a crowd of people on the lawn—doubtless the Furleys, Tuttertons, Castletowers, Hartmoors, and Dumbledores. They all looked towards the approaching carriage, but my cousin took no further notice of us.

"There is Denis!" exclaimed Aunt Jane.

"For goodness sake, Aunt Jane," I said, "don't look at him! He is not at home." However, I had qualms in my own mind, and feared the parade-days might be changed.

When we had driven to the hall-door, my aunt could

no longer see her nephew, the entrance being at one side of the house and the drawing-room windows to the front.

The servant said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was not at home. Aunt Jane sent Thomas back to inquire if Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone were at home. "Not at home!" said the butler severely, and in a manner which cowed Thomas.

"Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone must be out driving with the Duchess," I remarked aside to Aunt Jane. But I was mistaken, for as we turned and drove away from the door, there stood Jumping Georgy on the lawn, not ten yards from the avenue. She wore her eye-glass, so we came, as it were, eye to eye. Aunt Jane bowed to her, with an upper lip and a dignity awful to behold. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone dropped her eye-glass and turned very red. If she did not bow, it was because she was too much flurried to do so.

Denis still leant out of the drawing-room window, so Aunt Jane gave him a very low bow. He returned it smiling, and with a wave of the hand. My aunt was sorely piqued to see him unabashed.

Our visit to the Abbey was an inexhaustible topic of conversation for Aunt Jane. She told my uncle what had occurred. He listened to her with unusual attention, looked very stern, begged her to say no more on the subject, and said nothing else himself. His look and his silence showed me the Rigardy-Wrenstones' conduct had insulted him deeply.

From trying, though ineffectually, to stay her flow-

ing indignation in Uncle Sherbrook's presence, Aunt Jane only talked the more unceasingly to me; and for once in my life I was glad she did so, as the day after our visit to the Abbey was the first anniversary of my mother's death. I had looked forward with a miserable trembling heart to this dreaded day. I had tried to forget when it would be, but the effort had only fixed the date more clearly in my mind. I had not dared to hope Aunt Jane and Snipkins would forget the anniversary, because I hoped for nothing now—it was a habit I had lost. Memory should be blind—it is terrible not only to remember but to see the finished agony again in every awful detail before your very eyes. This sight, from which there is no turning away, unmans strong nerves, and makes weeping fools of weak ones.

Uncle Sherbrook never forgot a date. I was sure he remembered the anniversary, and wished to avoid "Jane's scenes," because he announced his intention of going to Votlingham on important business immediately after breakfast, though the bay mare had been out the day before.

To my unspeakable relief, Aunt Jane seemed to remember nothing but the insult she had received at the Abbey. I noticed Snipkins's absence at prayer-time, and on asking, was glad to hear from my aunt that her maid had been sitting up all night nursing Sally Smith. When Snipkins went on an errand of mercy, and "nursed" old Tommies and Sallies, she was much muddled the next day. So I took heart,

and dared to hope Aunt Jane would not be reminded of the anniversary.

That whole morning, that whole livelong day, my aunt continued talking about the Rigardy-Wrenstones, and the more she talked the more indignant did she grow. I am glad to say she became a little exhausted towards night, after dinner, and took up a tract and dozed.

I spoke to Uncle Sherbrook of the weather, and hoped Aunt Jane might sleep soundly, but she awoke before long, to talk again with fresh energy. The running stream carried her so far that we seemed to be on the verge of—"Poor, dear Sophia." I had to seize her transition, give an abrupt twist to it, and manage the conversation till prayer-time. I made Uncle Sherbrook stare, for I talked and laughed loudly—as cowards do who would frighten away a ghost. Yet my laughter pained me like weeping.

Next morning I observed that Snipkins slept through the Commentary, so I was not surprised to hear Aunt Jane ~~wan~~dering upon cheerful subjects. But the day after Snipkins looked herself again, and my aunt came down to early prayers with tearful eyes. I am thankful to say Aunt Jane did not think it her duty to remain in hysterics all day long. She let me comfort her, and persuade her that to cry on the 1st of September, when she ought to have cried on the 30th of August, was no compliment to her poor, dear sister's memory; rather the contrary, because it showed she had forgotten the anniversary. She asked

if I had remembered the day, and was shocked beyond measure to find that I had. "Why, Sophy, if this is the 1st of September, the 30th of August must have been the day before yesterday, and that was the day your uncle went to Votlingham. Yes, Sophy, I am sure your uncle went to Votlingham the day before yesterday; and I remember you talked and laughed more than usual, for you hardly ever laugh, and even Edward noticed you were in good spirits."

Aunt Jane thought me heartless. This was an infinite blessing to me, for now at last she was satisfied that she felt poor, dear Sophia's death more than I did. "I should have cried all day on Thursday if I had known it was the anniversary. I know I should, Sophy; I know I should!"

From henceforth my aunt did not consider it necessary to be inconsolable. So she allowed her thoughts to be more and more engrossed by the exciting events of her exciting life.

Rigardy-Wrenstone, most unexpectedly, made an exciting event in Aunt Jane's life by getting a sudden fit of civility. It was one of my cousin's peculiarities never to avoid any one he had treated in an uncivil or cavalier manner—he would even go far out of his way to meet a person to whom he had been particularly rude. He liked handling his own importance visibly, as a miser likes touching his gold. Rigardy-Wrenstone never seemed to feel he was a really great man unless he could insult you to-day and patronise you to-morrow; for he loved to patronise, and had a taste

for popularity, which he liked to gratify when it did not interfere with his other tastes.

On the Sunday following our memorable visit to the Abbey, Denis stayed behind his Dumbledores, Castletowers, Hartmoors, Tuttertons, and Furleys, and waited for us at the church door. He met us with a flourish of politeness, and was in a state of glorious condescension.

"How do, Jane? how do, Sherbrook?" he seemed to my astonished ear to be saying; and he gave a wave of his hand to "Sophy." My uncle looked sternly dignified, slightly raised his hat, and walked on.

Uncle Sherbrook's stonily contemptuous manner only made Denis the more intensely civil to Aunt Jane. He insisted upon carrying her great big prayer-book, like Goliath's head, in a triumphal procession all along the path to the churchyard-gate. My hymn-book was also seized upon, and I was patronised. Rigardy-Wrenstone made Aunt Jane lean upon his arm, and asked her opinion of the sermon. This temptation was not to be resisted: my aunt had such pleasure in giving a really sound opinion, that she talked herself into good-humour. Having once begun to give forth sound doctrine, she could not stop. She stood by the wicket-gate talking to Denis for a long time, much to the surprise of Robert Jones and the horses. My cousin encouraged her with pleasant flattery.

At parting Aunt Jane was quite affectionate to

Rigardy-Wrenstone, and promised to send him Dr MacShaw's 'Sound Sentiments, or Sound Seed sown upon Sound Subjects.'

Uncle Sherbrook had walked home.

On Sunday we dined at three o'clock, and Uncle Sherbrook took his after-dinner rest in the afternoon instead of in the evening. Aunt Jane seriously disturbed his quiet hour by giving him a fit of astonishment. She praised Denis very much, and remarked that he was an improved character. She said something about good seed sown in youth by those labourers in the Lord's vineyard to whom had been vouchsafed the gift of exercising a beneficial influence upon young people.

Gracious! thought I; she must mean herself! No one else answers the description.

The change in my aunt was sudden—from blame to praise and satisfaction.

"Good heavens, Jane!" exclaimed my uncle, starting up in his arm-chair—"good heavens, Jane! what has come over you?"

"My dear Edward!" screamed my aunt, "do I look pale? perhaps I am ill? Sophy, call Snipkins!"

Aunt Jane had not the slightest idea of her husband's meaning. This did not surprise me, as I had often observed she could be unaware of a change in her own mind: that mind, being without backbone, could bend all ways.

Uncle Sherbrook clearly explained to his wife the cause of his astonishment; but without effect. He

could get no satisfactory answer from her. In fending and proving, he only grasped at his own reflection in the stream, and found his hand was full of water. He asked Aunt Jane what had occurred to make so great a change in her feelings towards Denis; and my aunt declared she had not changed at all—that she was a person who never did change, or could change, to anybody: she made a grievance of the accusation, and from this grievance slipped through my uncle's fingers into another—and so on, and so on.

In despair the poor man turned to me and talked about the weather. The truth is, Aunt Jane had been flattered into a new state of feeling; and flattery is an opiate which gives us pleasant dreams, so that, not believing we have dreamt, we find impressions on our waking mind, and think they were always there because we did not consciously receive them.

CHAPTER VI.

The Rector became seriously ill, and Dr Daly said he must take a holiday; so Uncle Sherbrook sent him a cheque for £100, and he and Mary went away for change of air.

During the Rev. James's absence, Rigardy-Wrenstone seemed to persuade himself he was bishop of the diocese, and that the living was in his own gift. He accordingly instituted Jumping Georgy rector of the parish. It is true, a curate came from a distance, and undertook those parts of the service which neither the great man nor his wife could legally perform; but you hardly noticed this clergyman.

The Rev. George played the harmonium and kept strict order in the sacred edifice. She wore her eyeglass, and noticed if any one was late for the voluntary, and sent that person a message to be in time next Sunday. She introduced *introits* and a new hymnal. My uncle and aunt had grave doubt as to the "soundness" of this compilation, and were quite sure the *introits* were Ritualistic.

The Rev. George decked the Holy Communion

table in an elaborate altar-cloth. She carpeted the east end with what Aunt Jane called a "High Church carpet," and she put a deep band of worsted-work to match round the pulpit and reading-desk. The design of this work was peculiar: a stiff stick, with a stiff leaf low down at each side, grew straight up into a round flat something, which might perhaps have been a sunflower had it been a flower at all. This strange plant grew all alone: there was no connecting branch between it and the next plant. It was worked in palish yellow on a sickly-green ground.

Aunt Jane considered the pattern "High," and the colours "very, very High." Uncle Sherbrook thoroughly disapproved of Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's "upholstery."

The female rector also decorated her husband's own particular reading-desk with worsted-work of the same peculiar pattern; for she gave him a desk all to himself. The Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone read the lessons in the presence of his tenantry, his neighbours, and his distinguished guests. He read as if he were paying the Almighty a compliment!

Rigardy-Wrenstone passed round the bag with his own Right Reverend hands. I had hitherto thought this a churchwarden's commonplace duty, but Denis performed it as if it were an act of gracious condescension. When he handed the bag to the tenantry of his own and Uncle Sherbrook's estates, he bowed at the end of the pew, then turned round sideways in the aisle, folded his arms, and looked ostentatiously

towards the ceiling. And this he did from pew to pew—bowing, turning round, folding his arms, and tossing his head upwards. Had he performed these ceremonies once or twice, you might not have noticed them; but when he went through this exercise of bowing, turning, folding his arms, and tossing his head, down the whole length of the aisle, this repetition of the same motions caught your attention. It was as if my cousin said aloud, "Good people, I graciously permit you to put in your pennies unobserved. Do not be alarmed or hurried by my grandeur, but take your time. I fold my arms, and look away."

When the Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone entered our square pew, he laid aside this ostentatious delicacy, and became a keen observer. One Sunday, while her nephew still stood high in her favour, Aunt Jane forgot her purse. I heard her whispering to my uncle on and off during the service. When Rigardy-Wrenstone brought round the bag, Uncle Sherbrook put in half-a-crown. Aunt Jane put in nothing. She shook her head. The bishop of the diocese assumed an air of severe displeasure, and continued holding the bag to my aunt; so she said in a loud whisper, "Your uncle has given a shilling for me." Upon this Denis handed the bag a second time to Uncle Sherbrook, thereby intimating that he considered half-a-crown an insufficient offering for two people.

Uncle Sherbrook stared a moment in utter amazement. Then he gravely put his hand into the bag and took out the half-crown, and was going to replace

it in his own pocket, when he stayed his hand and said audibly—"I am wrong. It was not to you I gave this money." And he put it back again into the bag.

The Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone passed on.

When the service was finished, my cousin did not wait behind his friends, or offer to carry Aunt Jane's big prayer-book. He did wisely to walk on, for my uncle was much incensed by his nephew's impertinent attempt at tyranny and coercion.

Uncle Sherbrook's irritation was not lessened by a message which the Rev. George sent Aunt Jane through the parish-clerk. The female rector requested Mrs Sherbrook would keep her remarks to herself during divine service, as the words Mrs Sherbrook had spoken while the collection was being made were audible at the harmonium.

The clerk gave this message nervously. There was something about Uncle Sherbrook which awed the whole village, even the parish-clerk, great and irremovable dignitary of the Church as he was. My uncle, in reply, ordered him to tell Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, with his compliments, "that ladies were not permitted to be churchwardens."

I thought it likely the clerk would give this message word for word; for though he might do so at the peril of his life, he could not imperil the tenure of his office. Old Tom was clerk of Harefield Church by divine right: he used to boast that Parliament turned out ~~their~~ Disraylies and Gladstones, but could not

turn him out, not nor it was all made up of Bishops and Harchbishops ; the likes of them had nothing to say to him ; he was his own master—" and the Rector he knows it. We gets on well together, for he does not come ha-meddling with my prerogatties, and I don't go ha-meddling with his."

I felt certain the Rev. George was sure to have meddled with old Tom's prerogatives.

If I had any doubt of the clerk's courage, it was dispelled by a little circumstance which occurred next day. When Uncle Sherbrook drove through the village to Mr Jones's office, he noticed nothing new. But on his way home he thought there was something unusual in the look of the "Sherbrook Arms." He stopped the carriage a little way down the street, and got out to see what the something could be. My uncle told us he did not like his carriage to be seen standing before a public-house, and he did not think it right to set the village a bad example by sending Thomas to inquire what alteration Hodgkin had made in the outside of his establishment. The village might have thought Thomas was drinking beer. So my uncle went himself in his own dignified person, and told a workman who was standing by the Sherbrook Arms to send the landlord out to him.

My uncle said Hodgkin was much surprised at his inquiries, and expressed the greatest astonishment at finding Uncle Sherbrook had not noticed his new sign-board. My uncle looked up and saw the WREN-STONE ARMS painted in fresh capital letters where

he had seen the SHERBROOK ARMS for sixty years. The green bear had also disappeared, and in its stead there was the unfinished sketch of Sire Denis-de-l'Arrière-Garde's helmet. I give the rest of the story in Uncle Sherbrook's own words: "I said to Hodgkin, 'Pray, Mr Landlord, for what very good reason have you changed the name and sign your house has borne these many years, and bore in your father's lifetime?' The man declared to me, Jane, that your nephew had been at him this long time to change them, and had finally told him yesterday afternoon he would send round a sign-painter to do the job at his own expense. 'Upon my honour, sir,' said Hodgkin, 'Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone would give me no peace. He came telling me that you, sir, thought it an offence to have your name on my establishment, and that Mrs Sherbrook considered it a sin; and very sorry,' said the man, 'I was to hear it.' I think Hodgkin was sorry, though he is an impertinent fellow for all that—a con——"

"My dear Edward!" screamed my aunt.

"He had the impudence to tell me he saw I should like to have my name and arms upon his house again, and that if I would say the word, it should be done. So I told him plainly he had better take care what he saw, and only see things that were to be seen; and I said if he dared to put my name again upon a public-house, he should not hear the end of it in a hurry. I said no more, but just walked away. I am glad I kept my temper—some men would have lost theirs."

"But, my dear Edward," said Aunt Jane, "you never, never lose your temper! I know you never do!"

I was convinced old Tom had taken my uncle's message to the Abbey. The sign-board was the quick revenge!

Denis is certainly a little-minded tease. No one but a man (should I say a woman?) with a real taste for huffing his neighbours could have invented the odd and pettifogging little ways of worrying them that he invented. In its very small way, this last touch of worry was a masterpiece. Any one who knew Uncle Sherbrook as Denis knew him, was well aware he did not really dislike to see his name and arms upon the village inn. My uncle's old Scotch ancestor was not angry when a set of tipsy retainers, with no particular name or clothes of their own, took the chief's name as they took their wife's tartan petticoat,—because it was the most honourable covering to their nakedness they could lay hands upon. The Highlanders glorified themselves by assuming the name of the greatest man amongst them; but in doing so, they proved he was the greatest man, and therefore did not offend him.

The late lamented Hodgkin showed the village of Harefield that Sherbrook was the most honourable name a man could drink to. My uncle preached against the public-house as a chieftain might against the vices of his clan, without a thought of abdication. Aunt Jane considered beer an abomination, yet somehow the idea of being offended by the "Sherbrook Arms" had never struck her.

Thus Rigardy-Wrenstone had the satisfaction of conferring an open boon and a secret annoyance upon his aunt and uncle. To a mind like his this must have been a satisfaction!

As for me, I could not help being amused by the ingenious contrivance. The two Sherbrooks were a comedy—my aunt the funnier character of the two; because Uncle Sherbrook betrayed his great annoyance chiefly by a stern silence, but Aunt Jane ran through a series of transitions, which led her into a sad falling off from her strictest principles. I had it on the tip of my tongue to call her a backslider, but I thought the word did not quite suit a mind that was really sliding all ways at once.

Next Sunday, Rigardy-Wrenstone met us at the church-door in a state of magnificent elation. He condescended to patronise Uncle Sherbrook, who, by the way, did not condescend to patronise him. My cousin carried Goliath's head in triumph, and did the honours of the church and surrounding territory as if they belonged to him. His manner and shirt-cuffs on this occasion amused me. He was certainly a very stylish lord of the manor and bishop of the diocese; and you could see he gave such complete satisfaction to himself, especially as bishop of the diocese! The pity was, that this satisfaction should not have been shared by the parishioners.

The Right Reverend the bishop of the diocese, and the Reverend the female rector of Harefield, worked admirably together; but unfortunately, their ritual grew

higher and higher every Sunday, until the village felt itself rapidly going over to Rome. The climax of Popish scandal was reached on the very last Sunday before the Reverend James's return, when the Reverend George placed a pair of lighted candles in remarkably tall candlesticks on the altar,—for Harefield believed with all its soul that the female rector placed them there with her own hands. It is certain old Tom did not do the illegal act: this pillar of the Church strongly objected to "Rittalistic practices," and loudly complained that his "prerogatties and the Rector's" had been infringed.

The candles and candlesticks shocked Aunt Jane and the whole congregation. They were an abomination in the sight of Uncle Sherbrook.

The Reverend James returned to his parish while the candles were still burning in his church. I pitied the poor man! His illness had lowered him; and though he came home better than he went away, he was far from well. When strong, he disliked making up his mind to an important decision; he must have hated it when ill.

The very day he arrived, Denis and Uncle Sherbrook met to do battle at the rectory. They must have tortured James Sherbrook, as they disagreed on every subject; and no doubt the Rector wished to agree with both of them! The interview ended by a compromise. The Reverend James consented to retain the hymnal, the carpet, and the worsted-work, but rejected the altar-cloth, the *introits*, the candles and

candlesticks. This decision pleased neither Denis nor Uncle Sherbrook; but then it did not altogether displease either of them. Not so with their wives. Aunt Jane accused her husband of permitting the thin end of the wedge to be introduced with his consent. The Reverend George went in person and reproved the Reverend James (not too gently, it was said) for having truckled to the prejudices of the Low Church. She also told his wife not to trouble herself about the church-music, as she had arranged with the choir what hymns should be sung.

And behold, when, on the Sunday following the Reverend James's return, Mary Sherbrook walked into church at the head of her school-children, who should she find already seated at the harmonium but the female rector of Harefield! Old Tom said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had been sitting there from an early hour. The Reverend George played a *fugue* of Bach's on the old harmonium, though it has two stiff stops.

The clerk by right divine of Harefield considered his clergyman's wife had been deprived of her prerogative, and showed his sentiments by making himself generally disagreeable to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and by disobeying most of her numerous orders. Moreover, when the great musician played Bach, the clerk told the butler from the Abbey that "his congregation did not approve of Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's jigs; his congregation thought Mrs Sherbrook's psalm-tunes more church-like." The remark was repeated to the Reverend George, who forthwith begged the Reverend

James to dismiss the parish-clerk for impudence. Upon the Rector's declaring he had no power to do so, the Reverend George tried to dismiss old Tom herself; but Tom would not go. He upheld his divine right in a stanch and disagreeable manner, — for old Tom's temper was far from amiable when rubbed the wrong way. The female rector and the parish-clerk were not on pleasant terms together.

CHAPTER VII.

Mary Sherbrook bore her deposition from the harmonium mildly, but not without tears. I was a person to whom Mary told her many disappointments, her secret hopes, her joys. I knew the little woman in all her silliness, her weakness, her vanity, her devotedness—for she is devoted, in her own way—to her husband and children. She used to say no one ever listened to her but me, and she would wish I could often come to see her alone. But Aunt Jane was sadly offended if I paid a visit without her. It was not really by listening that I gained Mary's affections—I bribed her to love me with pretty colours. She does not know this, but I do. Mary knows nothing about herself or other people, for she has never in her life reflected upon any person or thing.

When kind friends gave the clergyman's wife a present, they invariably made her some useful ugly gift, for they seemed to think nothing could be useful that was not ugly. Thus Aunt Jane gave her four dozen yards of a most serviceable woollen material—a sort of green and yellow Scotch plaid. My aunt recommended

her to make plaid trousers for the two elder boys if any stuff were left over from the other children's frocks. Mary invented excuses, and tried to evade a rash promise. But Aunt Jane took it into her head that Mary Sherbrook thought there would not be stuff enough; so she sent to Scotland for more green and yellow plaid, and had the boys' little trousers, jackets, and waistcoats made by a tailor in Votlingham, "as a pleasant surprise." If a stranger had passed through Harefield just then, he would have thought the tobacconist's wooden Scotchman had a very large family.

Aunt Jane said, "I love to see a little family dressed all alike in sensible warm clothing." She would have been offended had the children not regularly worn the plaid suits, for she admired her own useful present.

The unfortunate mother of the green and yellow clan suffered much. Mary Sherbrook had a great eye for elegance and beauty. It is a rare gift amongst Englishwomen of her class; or should I call it a rare misfortune?—because an instinct which might be a blessing will not unfrequently become a curse if it can find no satisfaction in our own station in life. Mary's unbounded admiration for beauty, elegance, and refinement might have wrecked her happiness, for she had no strength of character. Her good fortune in marrying the handsome, refined young gentleman she fell in love with, was no common one for a yeoman farmer's daughter,—not even when the girl has an intriguing mother clever enough to make a boy engage himself at nineteen. Few men of family, like James Sherbrook,

would have kept to the secret engagement at twenty-three.

Elegant furniture, a well-made dress, soft colours, and "sweetly pretty" ribbons, have an irresistible attraction for the Rector's wife. There are shades of grey and pink which she loves to call "aristocratic." The word is an odd and vulgar but a true expression of her feeling. She does not associate pale, tender colours with the homely friends of her youth!

Whenever my mother and I made Mary Sherbrook a present, we took care it should be a pretty one. I never shall forget her saying to me after my mother's death, "Poor dear Mrs Thursley! I was very fond of her, Sophy; and she gave me the prettiest and most becoming bonnet I ever had!"

I had sympathy with the failing most people upbraided in Mary, because there is pity within me for all unsatisfied longings, even when they are foolish ones. So when I heard the whooping-cough had come to the rectory, knowing the younger children were whooping in the last remains of the Scotch plaid, I had four little buttoned-coats made of grey cashmere, long enough to hide the plaid frocks. The coats had short capes lined with pink silk. I did not wish Aunt Jane or Snipkins to see them; but they found them out! Nothing belonging to "Sophy" could remain hidden! The useless pink lining shocked Aunt Jane. It scandalised Snipkins, just as if the coats were intended for the workhouse! Snipkins objected to the Sherbrook children, and said they gave trouble wherever they went.

I waited to take the little coats to the rectory until the next large case of groceries arrived at Sherbrook Hall from London.

Mary's delight at the sight of the little garments was interesting to see. But when she tried them on the children, and found they quite covered the green and yellow frocks, her joy knew no bounds. She kissed me; and then, as Aunt Jane was not with me, she took my hand and confided to me the secret sorrow of her heart. She told me, with tears rolling down her cheeks, that she feared Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone would never again let her play the harmonium in church, "except in the afternoon, Sophy, when there is no one there." Sending the staring children from the room, she indulged in what she herself called "a good cry." Mary pressed my hand and looked at me piteously, so I made the most consoling speech I could think of in a hurry. "Don't cry, Mary," I said; "Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will soon break another stop, and then she can't play Bach on the harmonium. Powerful music powerfully played will put the old instrument quite out of order. So be hopeful and lively, my dear; before long Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will not care to play at the morning service." Mary's face brightened at this cheerful prospect. She said, "I think, Sophy, I could play the Old Hundredth if there was only one stop left." And she dried her eyes, but cried again, and then said she felt better, and smiled and kissed me. "Dear, dear Sophy," said she, "I feel quite happy now. It is so pleasant to

have a good cry! Is not it?" I did not know what to say to this, so I said, "Indeed!" as if I were speaking to Aunt Jane.

Mary likes crying. She really enjoys it! Oh, tears which to some are bitter miseries wrenched from the heart, what are you to others? Melted sugar-plums, I think, sweet to the taste.

When Aunt Jane found that instead of walking all alone on the back avenue, I had taken advantage of the great grocery ceremony to pay a visit at the rectory, she thought herself an aggrieved woman. My aunt was huffed if I went anywhere without her, or spoke to any one. Could I ever have walked alone, I should not even have dared to go into the cottages or speak to the poor people. Long ago Aunt Jane used to visit at every cottage on the estate, but she no longer did so. Snipkins would not let her, but visited and gave clothes and money in her stead.

Though Aunt Jane felt so hurt because I went to the rectory without her—"when you know, Sophy, I wish to go there"—she let a fortnight pass before she paid Mary Sherbrook a visit. "We shall be down at the front avenue-gate this afternoon," I would say. "Why not walk on to the rectory and pay your visit?" But this simple arrangement would not do at all. Aunt Jane chose to think her first visit to the rectory after "James's absence" should be paid in state.

"Your uncle always drives to Mr Jones's office; and if the carriage is never seen at the rectory, the village will talk."

"Drive then," said I. "Tell Uncle Sherbrook you only want to go to the rectory, and the bay mare will be well."

"Sophy," said my aunt, "you are very conceited, and you think you know everything; but how can you tell if the bay mare is coughing or not? No one knows anything about the horses' health except your uncle and Robert; and besides, Sophy, you have no knowledge of the world, or of the great difficulty there is in arranging what to do when people who are your own connections by marriage have distant relations who are quite common people; and you never seem to understand how very awkward it is for me to drive to the rectory because of Robert."

"Robert! What Robert?" asked I.

"Robert Jones," said Aunt Jane.

"The coachman?" cried I.

"To be sure," said Aunt Jane; "for, you know, Snipkins says he is a distant relation of old Jack Jones."

"I know it? I did not know anything of the sort. Just like Snipkins!"

"What are you saying, Sophy?" asked my aunt; but she did not wait for an answer. "And Jack Jones," she continued, "is Mary's grandfather. Such a connection for James! and Snipkins thinks Robert must be Mary's fifth cousin."

"Well, well!" I exclaimed, impatiently; "what a fuss about nothing! No one ever recognises a fifth cousin unless he is a duke! But you like making little difficulties, Aunt Jane. They are events, they

are landmarks to you, because your life is too easy, and the road lies too straight before you. You are tired of living in a flat country, so you heap up all the earth in your garden, and you make a mound of it; and when you have stepped over the mound, you think you have scaled a mountain."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed my aunt; "I know you think I am always in the wrong—and Snipkins says you do; but I have never walked over the mound in the garden, for I never walk on the flower-beds at all; but you do, Sophy, and you walk on the grass; but I won't argue with you, Sophy! It is no good arguing! Though it was Edward—it was your uncle who made that mound; and I don't think he has ever been so well since, for I consider that mound damp and unhealthy, because there is so much earth together, and it all catches the rain; and then the wet trickles down under the garden-wall on to the back avenue, and Snipkins says I get my feet wet."

To this day Aunt Jane is convinced I think she made the mound in the middle of the garden at Sherbrook Hall!

But were we to drive to the rectory, or were we not? This highly important question was at length decided, and in the following manner: After the matter had been "argued" in my hearing for a full fortnight on both avenues, my aunt walked one morning from the breakfast-table into the study, leaning upon Uncle Sherbrook's arm. "There is business weighing on her upper lip," thought I, "and affairs of

state are poised in her measured tread." So I ran into the library and took out an interesting book I had hidden under the sofa-cushions ages before. At last I shall spend a happy hour! What a relief! But five minutes had not passed when Aunt Jane opened the door with a "Sophy! Sophy!"

"Heavens!" cried I, flinging my book on the floor in a fit of disgust; "what is the matter now? Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane! what teasing little bother is the worry now?"

"Sophy! Sophy!" repeated my aunt, not coming a step farther into the room, and looking bewildered—"Sophy, you might get up and come when I call you; and go and put on your things, for the carriage will be at the door in twenty minutes; and Edward says we must not keep the horses waiting; and indeed we had better not, for I don't know what is the matter with Edward, for when I asked him how Robert Jones could drive to the rectory when Snipkins says Robert is Mary Sherbrook's cousin, your uncle called poor Snipkins an impertinent busybody; and I am sure Snipkins never interferes in anything! And Edward said it was the height of impudence to suppose his cousin's wife was connected with Robert Jones; and he said the carriage should go to the rectory this very morning, and show all the gossips in Harefield that the Sherbrooks were his cousins, and nobody else's; and Edward said we must not keep the horses waiting; and he said it three times, and quite in a loud voice, Sophy."

"She went to the joiner to buy him a coffin,
And when she came back the dog was a-laughing."

We do not always find people exactly in the humour we expect them to be in; so it would be well if each of us could look into a fairy mirror, and by wishing, see our friend before we rang at his door. If Mary Sherbrook had been a lucky woman, her fairy godmother would have held such a mirror to Aunt Jane. As it happened, the contrast between the poor Mary my aunt expected to see, and the Mary she really saw, made her think "James's wife" just the frivolous sort of hair-plaiting young person that would have scandalised St Peter.

Aunt Jane was shocked—there is no other word for it,—she was shocked to find Mary Sherbrook in her best dress and best spirits, when for a whole fortnight she had pictured to herself the Rector's wife as a humble creature shrinking from the sight of Robert Jones, and entirely occupied in making humiliating reflections on the social position of her distant cousins. Instead of this poor being—"such a connection for James!"—we found the pretty little brown-eyed lady dressed out in pale dove-colour, with a pink ribbon round her slender throat, and pink ribbons in her dark hair; a smart little lady, whose mind, Aunt Jane soon discovered, did not dwell with poor relations, but was elated into the very heights of fashion.

The tidiness of the rectory drawing-room was remarkable; and it was only half-past eleven, and yet no children were to be seen! Remarkable, too, was

the length of Mary's new gown, and still more remarkable was the air with which the little lady, throwing aside her worsted-work, drew herself up and came to meet us, stepping high, and twisting her shoulders and her skirts for all the world like Jumping Georgy! I expected a "Thankee!"

Usually Aunt Jane's severe propriety alarms Mary, and makes her quite silent; but this day Mary seemed to have put on a new nature with her new airs and new ribbons. We were not seated before she exclaimed, "Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, did you pass Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's carriage in the village? and is it coming this way?" Her face flushed with anxious excitement.

"I have not seen Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's carriage," said Aunt Jane, in a repressive tone; "but indeed, I doubt my knowing it if I did see it, for I have seen it but seldom, as Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone does not tire her horses visiting her husband's relations."

"Oh, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is so kind for such a wonderfully fashionable person," replied Mary, unabashed; "and I do think now, Sophy, she is right to play the harmonium in the morning, because it might seem quite odd to the villagers if she only played in the afternoon. Really, I never saw such a fashionable person; and her dresses show so well upon her, particularly when she walks, just as if they knew they were moving in stylish society. And Lady Tutterton! Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, she is charming—so very nice; and she came here last Tuesday to see me, and

she had the most becoming hat on. You cannot imagine anything more becoming to her style of feature." Aunt Jane's looks were stony. "Do you know, Sophy," said Mary, turning to me—"do you know, Lady Tutterton wore a dress of exactly the same colour as this one of mine! and I had ordered this without knowing it was the new fashion. Smith was making it at the time; and, Sophy, I was quite satisfied with all the directions I had given; and the only new idea I took from Lady Tutterton's dress was in the length of the skirt. I told Smith to make this a yard longer than usual behind. How do you like it, Sophy?"

Mary Sherbrook rose, looked at Aunt Jane, and hesitated; and then she looked at me. I longed to be good-natured, and encourage her to show her pretty finery; but I heard my aunt groan, and I saw her eyes rolling to the ceiling. I knew she would think "James's wife" a tinkling cymbal and a pearl in the snout of a swine; so I answered poor Mary with a forbidding look. It is painful to snub the little pleasures of others when you have sympathy with every kind of joy—when you would be glad yourself if a new gown could make you happy. My aunt sighed again. "A colour that will not last," said she, solemnly passing sentence of death—"a colour that will not last, Mary, and a material that has no wear in it!" Mary Sherbrook sat down and hid the blushes of disappointment by bending to pick up her worsted-work.

Aunt Jane talked on, and said some stuffs wore much better than others; "and Smith tells me drabs

are what he calls fast colours, while greys are sure to fly." I need hardly say my aunt did not fail to mix good moral advice with the expensive cashmeres and the cheaper merinoes; she even quoted the Scriptures.

But sound doctrine let loose in a rectory makes no sensation there. Clergymen's wives are so accustomed to sermons, that many of them get a way of acquiescing in sound moral sentiments without listening to them. From time to time Mary said, "Just so; very true; yes, to be sure; ah! oh!" She did her worsted-work and counted her stitches quite quietly, without showing any signs of impatience or the slightest inclination to interrupt Aunt Jane. In fact, sermons and the Proverbs of Solomon were a second nature to her.

Once only did Mary raise her eyes. She dropped the worsted-work, gazed out of the window, and for a moment listened breathlessly; then turned to her work again, whispering to me, "Only a cart, Sophy—only a cart."

Aunt Jane, fully occupied with her own admirable sayings, did not notice this little aside, but went on stringing conjunctions and sound doctrine together as glibly as if she had only just begun to talk. My aunt is like most voluble preachers in and out of the pulpit. Her sermons have a beginning, but no middle, and never an end. If she does finish, it is by accident.

While Aunt Jane was still discoursing hopelessly,

the design of Mary's worsted-work accidentally caught her eye. The pattern was that same peculiar yellow plant with which the Reverend George had decorated the Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone's reading-desk. My aunt stopped short: she had suddenly perceived the mark of the Beast!

"Mary," cried she, "what Ritualistic, Puseyite Papist designed that pattern?"

"Just so, just so," replied Mary, mechanically.

"Justojusto?" exclaimed Aunt Jane; "and pray, who is Mr Justojusto? A fine Italian Popish name for an English Church milliner to have!"

Mary looked up amazed, understanding nothing. She had answered imagining the sermon to be still going on, for she was not paying sufficient attention to know it had ceased. No one could believe the difficulty there was in explaining this little misunderstanding to the two misunderstood. They were neither of them very quick of apprehension.

At length Aunt Jane realised that James's wife was busy working, at Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's request, a strip of church embroidery in the "Highest" hues.

My aunt was scandalised to find the audacious Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had introduced the thin end of the wedge into the heart of the Rector's own wife. The great Popish plot was nothing to this! "James himself will be her next victim!" exclaimed Aunt Jane. "Oh, Mary, Mary," said she, "can you, the wife of a clergyman of the pure Church of England, take pleasure in such colours as these?"

"They are a little sickly," replied Mary, "and I should prefer pink and grey."

"But do you feel no objection to them for another reason, Mary? I mean, as an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual backsliding?"

"Very true," said the Reverend James's wife, who seemed to be quietly settling down for another sermon.

And in truth Aunt Jane looked as if she had a mind to preach again; but at this moment a carriage was heard in the distance.

"It is she! it is she!" exclaimed Mary Sherbrook, jumping up in great excitement, and running to the window; "she is in the pony carriage, and I can see it turning up our lane from the county road, and Lady Tutterton is with her. Oh, Sophy, Sophy, do ring the bell, and Anne will have time to wash her hands."

Aunt Jane asked, "What on earth has happened? Who is expected?" But Mary gave no answer, for she was quite taken up settling the antimacassars.

I told Aunt Jane it was Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone who was coming. Rising, she said to Mary, "Then I will say good-morning." Now, I am quite sure Aunt Jane would have liked to stay had Mary pressed her. Mary Sherbrook was not sufficiently a woman of the world to say, "Oh dear no! Pray, do not run away!" So she said, "I will call Robert Jones," and she opened the window in all haste, and called to the coachman, who was at the other side of the gravel-sweep, to drive forward immediately. She ordered her fifth

cousin after quite an imperial fashion. Mary was rapidly preparing her grandest manners for Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's reception.

Aunt Jane took leave with much dignity, and left the house in state. We passed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone driving her ponies on the avenue. Aunt Jane told Robert to stop, but Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone drove on.

All the way home, and all the afternoon, and all the evening, my aunt lamented over the thin end of the wedge she had perceived at the rectory.

Aunt Jane did not care for Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. But we often like attention to be shown us by those we do not care for. It did not please Aunt Jane to find Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone patronising Mary (old Jack Jones's granddaughter!) at the rectory, when this dashing lady hardly treated her husband's own aunt with the ordinary civility of a near neighbour. As for me, I wondered that even in Harefield a *Thankee* more or less should be thought worth envying.

Jumping Georgy herself increased my aunt's annoyance. Aunt Jane happened to be sitting in the drawing-room late one afternoon, when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone drove up to the Corinthian porch. Aunt Jane saw Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone drive up, and then she saw her drive away. My aunt rang the bell, and found Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had only left cards. When told Mrs Sherbrook was at home, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had said she could not come in, as she was driving with Lady Tutterton.

The following Sunday my aunt would carry her own prayer-book to the churchyard-gate.

Denis must just then have been rather short of people upon whom to practise the fine art of popularity, because that very Sunday afternoon he wrote my aunt a flattering letter, and sent her back Dr MacShaw's 'Sound Sentiments, or Sound Seed sown upon Sound Subjects.' There were marginal notes in my cousin's handwriting. Denis begged Aunt Jane would read his remarks, and let him know if he held sound views.

My aunt thought some of the views sound, but others she thought grievously unsound; so she took up her pen and stated her opinion at length. By the eighth page she must have sown herself into a growing affection for her only brother's only son, because she told me she finished her letter by hoping that in time Denis would become a useful vessel of righteousness, a measure pressed down and running over with sound doctrine, so that he and his uncle might walk hand in hand, and thus influence the parish of Harefield, leading souls in the way they should go.

My cousin thereupon wrote back to remind Aunt Jane that a joint apostleship had once turned into enmity the friendship of two great divines. "St Paul," wrote he, "agreed with himself better than he did with St Barnabas."

Aunt Jane thought there was something "rather unsound, Sophy, about what Denis says; but I do not exactly know what it is, so I think I had better write

again and send him Dr MacShaw's 'Careful Considerations on Christian Contention in the Catholic Church.' Dr MacShaw always has some new interpretation of an old text, and he thinks St Paul and St Barnabas never fought at all."

"Pray, how does he prove it?" asked I.

"Sophy," said my aunt, "read the book yourself and you will see."

So Aunt Jane cast the 'Careful Considerations' and half-a-dozen sheets more of her own sound doctrine upon the miry waters of Harefield Abbey.

When this correspondence ceased, I perceived my aunt had written herself into charity and good-humour with her nephew, and into forgetfulness of her niece's shortcomings. I therefore fancied she might perhaps be as easily led to preach herself into kindly friendship with other sinners.

I thought it a pity an estrangement should grow up between my uncle and his next of kin. So, waiting till the vision of the tinkling cymbal in the dove-colour dress had faded a little from my aunt's mind, I watched my opportunity, and one evening, when Aunt Jane, as usual, was sighing over the thin end of the wedge at the rectory, I hinted that if Mary were oftener invited to Sherbrook Hall, my aunt might perhaps turn her head so far one way that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone could not turn it the other. Uncle Sherbrook thought this not altogether unlikely. Aunt Jane seemed pleased at the idea.

From this time the Rector and Mary, and even the

best behaved of the children, were frequently invited to lunch at the Hall. Aunt Jane corrected the children, and improved the occasion to Mary Sherbrook. Mary took her sermons with admirable good temper—partly because she never listened to them, and never seemed to know they were preached to her own sins.

As to the Rector, my uncle and aunt really enjoyed his society, for he agreed with both of them.

Aunt Jane's subscriptions to the Clothing Club and other parish charities generally passed through the hands of Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart; but the admirable Catherine being still away collecting in distant parts, my aunt made the Reverend James her parish almoner. Snipkins was only high almoner to the cottages on the estate. The Rector expressed astonishment at the unusual munificence of Aunt Jane's contributions. My aunt said she always gave exactly that same amount. The Rector could not agree with her, though he ceased to contradict her, as it was not in his nature to keep on contradicting a positive and voluble lady.

And so it happened, little by little, that we came to be on good terms with all our neighbours. I felt as if I were living in Arcadia, as that is the only country place one hears of where everybody speaks to everybody else. Now in Harefield even Jumping Georgy said "Thankee!" when you met her; and Aunt Jane stopped the carriage if we met Dr Daly on the road, and she and the doctor were almost pleased to see each other. When we drove on, my aunt invariably said—"Not a bad man at heart, Sophy; it is just the

old system which is wrong." What could be more charitable? Aunt Jane also paid Jack Jones the compliment of stopping when we met him, and of saying, "Fine weather for the crops," or "Fine weather for the turnips, Mr Jones." And old Jack was so very respectful that I really believe Aunt Jane went out of her way to meet him, for he made her feel she was a great lady; so she quite enjoyed saying "Fine weather for the turnips" like a queen!

Arcadia! sweet Arcadia! where peace and charity do dwell, why is it you are such a disappointing place? Arcadia, as I have known it, is a land which worries me; for the perspective there, as in a Chinese picture, is all wrong. Small places and small cliques have a perspective of their own, where little things are great, and great ones, however near to us, are little.

This inartistic near-sightedness destroys the poetry of life. How we long to see beyond the narrow valley! for it feels like a prison, and the close air dwarfs our mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Poor dear Catherine!" sighed Aunt Jane, holding up an open letter—"poor, dear, excellent, indefatigable creature! I am so glad Gordon-Sherbrook has recovered his health!"

"What?" I asked; "is Mrs Stewart again rejoicing in the Lord over that young man's lung? I thought the lung was cured during the last century."

"Catherine always rejoices in the Lord," said my aunt, looking at me with an air of reproachful severity; "and Gordon-Sherbrook is an admirable young man! Personally, I have seen very little of him, but Catherine is always talking of him and praising him; and from what she tells me, I know he is really a well-brought-up, humble-minded Christian. It would be a privilege to enjoy his intimate acquaintance; and I had hoped to do so this autumn, but Catherine says he will not come to Riverbank with her, for she says he is going abroad instead."

I asked, "For the good of that lung?"

"Sophy, Sophy," exclaimed my aunt, quite angrily, "you never seem to think any one does anything from

the highest motive! Catherine says Gordon-Sherbrook is going abroad as a means, under Providence, for the furtherance of the good cause in those centres of folly, Popery, infidelity, wickedness, and vice—Paris, and Lyons, and Marseilles; and Catherine says the south of France is even more wicked than the north; so Catherine says Gordon-Sherbrook will spend some time, before joining his regiment at Malta, tract distributing on the—— let me see——" my aunt looked at Mrs Stewart's letter—"the—Riviera," said she.

"Tract distributing!" cried I—"tract distributing! I should have thought he would have hated his mother's ways! But no doubt she has tatted him into obedience. Poor fellow! when he was ill, she has tatted him into it! and rasped at him! and rasped at him! Heavens! I think I hear her voice!"

Aunt Jane stared at me with the most puzzled face imaginable. "I do not understand you, Sophy," she said—"I do not understand you, for you say such queer things, and you look as if you did not believe a word I said; but just read Catherine's letter yourself, and see if I am always in the wrong."

I glanced over the Scriptural composition. It was edifying: Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's letters are always edifying. "Aunt Jane, what is all this about the Princess and the purse?" I asked, handing her back the letter.

"Sophy, you never read anything attentively, —never!"

"Really, Aunt Jane, it is all so mixed up with texts which are in Scripture, and texts which ought to be in Scripture, that I cannot make out if I am reading about Mrs Stewart's good works or about the alms of the widows who were widows indeed."

"Well, well, Sophy!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, "I must say I think you are less clever than any one of your age I ever knew!"

My stupidity gave my aunt a glorious opportunity. She had the pleasure of telling me at great length how Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was detained another week north of the Tweed, "because she has collected so much for the Society for the Promotion of the Christian Sabbath Rest in the Homes of Postmen, that she has twenty-five guineas over after having paid all her own collecting expenses."

I put in—"The labourer is worthy of his hire."

"Why," said Aunt Jane, "that is exactly what Catherine says! so you must have read more of the letter than I thought; and I suppose you saw Catherine says that, by a rule of this particular Society, whoever clears twenty-five guineas for the charity is privileged to present the offering to the Royal patroness in a silk purse provided by the Society; and Catherine says the Princess Louise is coming for the *fête* and *déjeûner*, and if Catherine had cleared fifty guineas, she would be asked to lunch in the same tent with the Princess."

"Ah!" said I, "how Mrs Stewart must regret not having collected——" I corrected myself — "not

having cleared fifty guineas for the Promotion of the Christian Sabbath Rest in the Homes of Postmen! She is just the woman to regret it!"

Aunt Jane said Catherine always regretted her insufficiency in good works, "for Catherine always says, much as she has been enabled, under Providence, to labour for the good cause, she feels she does not do all she might for the Lord. And Catherine," added my aunt, "will come to Riverbank immediately after she has presented the purse to the Princess Louise. Now, really," she exclaimed, "I was beginning to wonder if Catherine would stay away for ever! I thought she would, Sophy."

"I, too, have wondered with you on that subject, Aunt Jane; but I did not think the excellent, indefatigable creature would stay away for ever. I never thought so. Never! I knew, Aunt Jane, she would come back some day to lunch and tatt, and to tatt and dine here when she has not got a cook."

I myself looked forward to the admirable Catherine's return with a hopefulness which I mistook for pleasure. I thought she might bring some new idea to Aunt Jane. But when Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, having duly presented the purse to the Princess Louise, did arrive in the neighbourhood, I knew right well I was not glad to hear her harsh, unsympathetic voice again.

Aunt Jane was delighted to see her Catherine once more. Not so Uncle Sherbrook; yet he was polite to Mrs Stewart, and sent her back to Riverbank in the carriage every night for a week.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had been very industrious north of the Tweed: besides the steeple, she had tatted elaborate cap-lappets for Snipkins, and a pin-cushion cover for Aunt Jane; so when first she came home, I am thankful to say she had used up all her cotton. There was none of that particular sort to be bought in Harefield.

It was not till the eighth or ninth day after her return that she began again to tatt the steeple between the courses at luncheon and dinner. The tatting instantly deranged Uncle Sherbrook's digestion. After dinner he hemmed and hawed, and hoped it was not true Mrs Stewart's brown horse had died last month? He asked this question with a guilty air, and did not look at Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, but turned his head in the contrary direction, and instead of waiting for an answer, remarked to me that the bay mare had not been quite the thing these last few days.

Mrs Stewart inquired, rather sharply, what ailed her? She moved round her chair and fixed an eye on Uncle Sherbrook. Her eye always made him uncomfortable. He took a furtive look at her, and asked me, in an embarrassed manner, if I thought he had marked the glass that morning? I know he would have liked me to suggest he had forgotten it; but Aunt Jane was quite sure Edward had marked the barometer, for Edward always marked the barometer after breakfast on his way to the study.

Mrs Stewart instantly talked about the weather, and talked until Uncle Sherbrook was sufficiently at his

ease to give us an account of the late spring, and wet summer, and windy autumn he remembered the year he was ordained. We all knew that year well, though I, for one, was not born at the time. The admirable Catherine took a deep interest in the late spring, wet summer, and windy autumn which characterised the year my uncle was ordained.

This clever woman had quick sight and tact enough where the tatting was not concerned ; that was the one matter in which she had no tact whatever. It was puzzling to see this one exception to the rule. But her habit of everlasting tatting had been so praised in goody circles and at pious teas, that she was intensely vain of it, and thought it a visible sign of spiritual energy.

During the course of the evening Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart mentioned, quite accidentally as it were, that since her return to Riverbank she had been trying to hear of a good strong mule, of a size to suit her little basket-carriage: she said mules were less voracious, and had better constitutions, than horses or ponies.

Uncle Sherbrook eagerly offered to help Mrs Stewart. He thought Jim Blokes had just the sort of animal she required. Mrs Stewart thanked Uncle Sherbrook, but said Jim Blokes would be asking some ridiculous price for the creature. "Now," she exclaimed, "I should not object to a nice little bargain. I am no coward myself, and the farmers' wives are a pack of geese. Supposing a mule backed into a ditch with one of them, and kept the good woman in mortal ter-

ror and in the ditch for an hour or two, why, the animal might be sold for a mere song next day."

Aunt Jane expressed intense horror at the bare notion of a mule backing into a ditch with anybody. Her dear Catherine reassured her by saying horses were always taking fright, running away, and jumping over precipices; while the worst sins she had ever known brought against a mule were a few sly kicks, or some tricks of stopping on a road or backing into a hedge: "and what is that?" said she.

"A mere nothing!" I remarked; "you would just sit tatting in the ditch."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart spoke of the mule in the most business-like, self-possessed manner, as if she knew exactly what she wanted, and had made up her mind on the subject a month ago. I wondered if this were really so. I watched Mrs Stewart's dark eyes with curiosity. Her restless eyes are the only part of her face where the expression habitually changes. There are times when her eyes will belie her words, and almost betray her thoughts. Her eager hungry nostrils and spare lips rarely change, for they are fixed by hard determined lines—lines which close in at the corners of the mouth with a covetous grasp. If ever the strong lines relax, it is by an effort—it seems to be by Mrs Stewart's own conscious effort.

"Sophy!" exclaimed the admirable Catherine, "don't stare at me like that! You are getting quite a disagreeable trick of staring. Pick up my shuttle, and look for your aunt's scissors, and get a card and wind

that cotton off the back of that chair." I thought in my own mind the mule was a sudden inspiration of genius.

No inspiration could have pleased Uncle Sherbrook better. The very next day he heard of a mule who had a fancy for stopping in a particular spot on a particular road, two miles from the railway station at the other side of Harefield. Whenever the mule stopped, Mrs Jennings's milk missed the early London train. The mule was to be had a bargain. "You can always avoid that particular bit of road, Mrs Stewart," said my uncle; "the mule is in good condition; and if you take him out cool, and bring him in cool, and don't canter him up every hill, he may last your lifetime."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart bought the mule. Mrs Stewart was not out of pocket by her purchase: six days in the seven she drove over from Riverbank before luncheon with old Dan seated on the back seat of the little carriage. The mule had two feeds of oats, and old Dan dined and supped. Snipkins permitted this hospitality, and received Dan at her own table. Mrs Stewart was on terms of cordial intimacy with the lady's-maid.

My uncle showed forbearance towards the tatting, now the bay mare was allowed to cough quietly in her warm stable at night. Besides, Mrs Stewart laid herself out to please Uncle Sherbrook in a way she had never done before: she remembered the weather for the last thirty years, and asked no questions about Jones or Buggle.

I was much struck by the sudden, extraordinary interest the best of women appeared to take in Uncle Sherbrook. She cross-examined me about the state of his health during her absence, remarking that a break-up of constitution was always to be expected in a man of seventy, no matter how well he might seem to wear.

I noticed, however, that she thought it more prudent not to discuss the constitution of a man of seventy with Aunt Jane. She talked solely on the subject she happened just then to have upon her nerves. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart always had some one subject on her nerves which she would talk over by the hour with Aunt Jane. At first, after her return, the one subject she never dropped was Mineham, and the urgent necessity of "dear Mrs Sherbrook's" paying an immediate visit to Lady Arabella Scott. "Now, my dear Mrs Sherbrook," she would say, "you must, you must coax Mr Sherbrook to let us have the carriage the first really fine day. I hear the Elmer-Elmers are coming to Mineham early next week. Snipkins heard it in the village—did not you hear it?" She asked me if I had heard the report. She was very anxious to know the truth of this important matter, and frequently exclaimed, with an air of piety and mystery, that Providence was always making a way and a means for those who laboured in the Lord's vineyard. Not being one of the elect, I was at a loss to imagine how Mineham and the Lord's vineyard could be connected together. If Lady Arabella's appearance suggested

any vineyard at all to one's mind, it was Naboth's, and not the Lord's.

Uncle Sherbrook got into such good-humour when Mrs Stewart bought her mule, that there really was but little difficulty in persuading him the precious horses might be driven to Mineham and back without injury.

So Aunt Jane and her Catherine drove off to Mineham together.

They came home from their visit in high spirits. Next morning, on the back avenue, I had a lengthy account from Aunt Jane of what she had said, and Catherine had said, and the Elmer-Elmers had said, and Lady Arabella had said. My aunt said that owing to her long drive all alone with Catherine she herself felt spiritually refreshed. "Every opportunity is a golden one to Catherine! her one talent becomes ten talents! and wherever her influence is felt, the talents intrusted to others are not permitted to lie idle." These parables were a little difficult to interpret at first, but I soon picked up their meaning. I gathered the Elmer-Elmers had proved "a field" for Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's energies. The indefatigable creature had persuaded Lady Arabella to persuade her guests to let Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart arrange, "under Providence," said Aunt Jane, "a little concert for the benefit of the Society for the Promotion of Protestant Principles amongst the French Infidels. No!" cried my aunt, correcting herself — "not that; I am mistaken! I forgot. I remember, Catherine made up

her mind the concert is to be given in aid of the Home for Homeless and Outcast Dogs!"

"Dogs!" cried I—"dogs, Aunt Jane! what on earth could make you say French infidels when you meant dogs?"

"A very natural mistake!" exclaimed my aunt, warmly—"a very natural mistake, Sophy! for I am sure Catherine was quite undecided all the way from here to Mineham. You don't understand, Sophy, because you never do seem to understand about anything; but Catherine thought she would not realise more than £20 in aid of the Promotion of Protestant Principles among the French Infidels. She has so often collected for that Society that she says her friends are tired of it, and might not take the concert tickets; and Catherine has never yet collected for the Home for those poor homeless, outcast dogs. Never! so with what she intends to collect the next time she goes upon one of her tours, she hopes she may clear fifty guineas for the charity if Miss Elmer-Elmer will sing for it, and the dear kind Baron von Klammerhammer; and Catherine means to get Lord Studhorsey to sing if she can find his address."

"Fifty guineas!" cried I; "then Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart will lunch in the Home with the dogs and the Princess Louise!"

"No," replied my aunt; "not with the Princess Louise—with Princess Christian. They are going to get Princess Christian to be patroness of this Society, and I am sure you have heard Catherine say so. But

you never listen, Sophy! and if you did hear, you would not understand."

"Oh! but I do understand Mrs Stewart's indecision. Indeed I do, Aunt Jane. I understand perfectly," said I, "why your admirable Catherine finally chose the dogs, and did not choose the infidels. I understand it all perfectly—perfectly, Aunt Jane!"

Not long after this conversation, Aunt Jane told me she had received an invitation from Lady Arabella for the three last days of the following week. "I think your uncle will go," she said; "and I am going, and Catherine is certainly coming with me."

I was enchanted to find my aunt, being happily convinced she felt "poor dear Sophia's death" more than I did, had no notion of refusing the blessed invitation.

The idea that I should have three whole days of perfect liberty filled me with intense delight.

The end of next week! Why, we were nearly there already! No time to settle anything! Aunt Jane had to telegraph to Madame Julie Browne for a new gown—"very deep mourning, but dressy," said the telegram; "evening body, with plenty of jet."

At the very last moment, to my unspeakable disappointment, Uncle Sherbrook declared he would not go to Mineham. What did he care for concerts? He would stay at home and take care of Sophy; he had also important business to transact. Aunt Jane could tell Lady Arabella he had very important business.

I think, when it came to the point, Uncle Sherbrook fought shy of the tatting, for it was quite clear Mrs Stewart did not intend taking the mule to Mineham. The mule was all very well just about Harefield, where the superior person was known. But she was not so generally known at the other side of the county; therefore a certain amount of style became necessary to keep up her dignity in distant parts. She proposed tatting with her face to the horses in Uncle Sherbrook's close carriage. My uncle would have been tatted at for nine long miles, he sitting backwards on the uncomfortable seat I so well know — a seat apparently designed for an infantine body with no legs.

Aunt Jane nearly shed tears in bidding her dear Edward good-bye. She gave me her blessing and much sound advice. The best of women joined in the good advice. Snipkins was in her glory: she wore Mrs Stewart's tatted lappets, "her Christian lady's precious gift," fastened on to her bonnet and pinned over the strings under her chin.

The carriage had hardly driven from the door, when Uncle Sherbrook called me into his study. And there I may say I stayed till Aunt Jane came home again! My uncle read me no end of leases, and a good deal of the old correspondence about that right-of-way. When he went out walking, he took me over that right-of-way path and explained the legal proceedings of the ten happiest years of his life. He could talk to me at his ease of Mr Jones's able hand-

ling of the case,—he dared not do so to Aunt Jane.

My silence must have seemed very learned to Uncle Sherbrook, because he was much pleased with me. Towards the end of our companionship in the study, he even read me his last-made will. He always drew up his own wills, and was very proud of being able to make them without the help of an attorney, for he said this was a subject on which he preferred consulting neither Jones nor Buggle.

I gathered from the will, that Edward-Brewen-Stewart-Sherbrook, of Sherbrook Hall, in the county of Dullshire, Esquire, gave, devised, and bequeathed most of his landed property to his cousin the Reverend James Brewen Sherbrook, clerk in holy orders; that he left Sherbrook Hall to his wife, Jane-Selina-Harriet-Barbara Sherbrook, for her lifetime, and to his aforesaid cousin James Brewen Sherbrook, his heirs and assigns (those were the very words), upon her decease; and that the said testator made his aforesaid wife, Jane-Selina-Harriet-Barbara Sherbrook, residuary legatee, and left her the interest of £30,000 besides during her life.

When my uncle had read so far, he rolled up the paper and held it closed in his hand. He leant back in his arm-chair and looked at me. I feared I might have to undergo an examination, and I had only paid a sort of general attention to the long-winded document. "Sophy," said my uncle, scanning me solemnly, "what do you think of that will?"

"I . . . well, Uncle Sherbrook, I suppose it is as interesting as that horridly particular, pedantic, *aforesaid* kind of language will permit."

"Sophy," exclaimed my uncle, with a look of undisguised amazement—"Sophy, if there is a meaning in what you say, I do not grasp it; and I perceive you have not grasped mine."

Uncle Sherbrook rose and locked up the will in its own box, and locked that box inside another, and that other in the biggest of the iron safes. When he had done all this, he turned to me with a kind expression, almost with a smile, on his solemn face. "Child," said he, gently, "it is strange you should not ask upon whom I have settled the £30,000 at your aunt's death."

On Jones and Buggle! thought I; but I said nothing, as I did not want to broach the inexhaustible subject of the two attorneys. I wanted to get out of the fusty study before the day was quite over and the sun had set. I was in a great hurry for Uncle Sherbrook to come out, as every moment I dreaded to see him produce another will. I imagined the study to be full of the aforesaid documents.

It was not till long, long afterwards, that it struck me Uncle Sherbrook had intended hinting to me I was to have £30,000 at Aunt Jane's death. Then it was not for many a long day that I ever thought of Uncle Sherbrook's will or wills, except as a pleasant pastime for him and Aunt Jane.

My onerous legal duties had one most unexpected interruption—Jumping Georgy paid me a visit!

"I have come," cried she, in a burst of volubility which amazed me—"I have come to hear all about this musical affair at Mineham, and to ask what charity it is by way of being for?"

"For the Home," I answered, "for Outcast and Homeless Dogs."

I expected a short *Thankee* in reply. I was astounded by a speech, spoken hurriedly with the energy of real annoyance. "When Lady Arabella wants to give a party," said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, "she always hunts up some queer charitable or semi-religious excuse for it. I should like to know," she exclaimed—"I should very much like to know, why Lady Arabella can't give a party because she is fond of society and wants to get invitations in return, just like any one else? But, you see, it costs money to entertain, and you must have young men for the ladies if you have not piety. Lady Arabella can't get the men; for do what she will, David Scott won't ask them: besides, she says her fortune cannot stand regular champagne-dinners, so she goes in for the cheap and charitable, and does not always pay for her own ices."

"She merely sends in the bill to the Blacks, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone."

"Well, well! I do wonder people go to her! I must say I do wonder. But they would go anywhere for anything in this county. Drive any distance to

hear any sort of screech-owl! The idea of importing those Elmers from town! As if there was no musical talent in Dullshire! But Dullshire people," added Jumping Georgy, hotly, "are a wretched set of ignoramuses, and don't know anything of art. It is screeching that tells with them! Mere voice! They care for nothing but plenty of wind in a person's lungs."

"That is a very odd mistake, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone," said I; "for I thought everybody knew our best amateurs have a great deal of genius, but very little voice. I have always heard, the only thing a singer does not want nowadays is a voice." The Drill-sergeant overlooked me with her eye-glass. The eye-glass awed me, and I held my tongue.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has no power of repartee. She is one of those Englishwomen who feel dreadfully uncomfortable if they suspect you mean more than you say, and yet are never sure if you do or do not. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's eye-glass grew very fidgety, going up to her eye and coming down again. The silence was getting awkward.

At length Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone asked abruptly, in an angry sort of manner, "Are they to have nothing but *solfeggi* at Mineham? Any one else going to sing?"

"Yes; Mrs Clerico," I said,—"the archdeacon's wife, you know."

"I know? Thankee! I do know. I—I should rather think I did know Mrs Clerico!"

"She is to take a part in a trio and quartette."

"Is it possible," cried Jumping Georgy—"is it possible Lady Arabella has imported that woman also?"

"I rather think," I replied, "Mrs Clerico is the lady who has imported herself. I think Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart said Mrs Clerico, hearing a rumour of this concert, wrote to say she would be delighted to sing for the dogs, if Lady Arabella liked to have her."

"Impudent woman!" exclaimed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone,—"the most impudent woman I ever met in my life; and with as much voice as a tin kettle! Teaching does *her* no good. You can't drum a true note into her. You may go over a passage twenty times, and think you have got her right at last; but off she will set, and run up a scale, with a scream at the end that puts your teeth on edge. And then, if you are clapped, she will declare the clapping is all for her, and wonder how you manage to sing sharp! Never saw such a vain, ambitious person—never! She would sing anything. She has got into our *Sam*—I'm sure I can't tell how; so she drags the archdeacon up to town in the spring, and says it is for the May meetings. There I find her stuck by my side at all our practices; and —can you believe it?—she is a woman with a following! If there is a part to be taken, there are a whole set of ladies always pushing Mrs Clerico forward: 'Oh, Mrs Clerico, you must sing that!' 'Mrs Clerico, it is just suited to *your* voice;' 'Mrs Clerico will take a first;' 'Mrs Clerico will take anything;' 'Now, dear Mrs Clerico,—dear Mrs Clerico, do sing, Mrs Clerico.' Clerico, Clerico! I have had 'Clerico'

dinned into me till I am sick of the name! The idea of that woman having a following!—a set of officious busybodies who actually bothered, and bothered, and bothered until they bothered me into taking a second to Mrs Clerico's first. I am sure I did not want to sing a duet with the woman at all: I knew she would break down to a dead certainty, though I drummed, and drummed, and drummed the notes into her. But what can you drum into a tin kettle? I went over the thing fifty times with her, for there were three bars which never would come right. She heard they were wrong, and said it was most extraordinary we never got them right. I said I was not surprised. She suggested I had better practise the high notes alone; 'and then,' said she, 'we might try them together again, and get those bars right!' But I knew very well, in my own mind, whose high notes would never come right; and they never did come right. When we sang at the concert, Mrs Clerico's high notes spoilt the duet. I turned my back upon her with disgust"—Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone turned her shoulder as she spoke—"I turned my back upon her with disgust! She was putting in for an *encore*, but I walked to my place, and there I sat, and let her beckon, and pretended not to see her." Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone shook her head, with a most determined look, and dropped her eyelids, as if resolved never again to see the *woman with a following*. "But now," exclaimed Jumping Georgy, springing up from her chair and standing at full height before me,—"now, after this horrid *fiasco*

of hers, what do you suppose she had the impudence to say to me? I did not meet her again that year,—I never saw her till the following season, when she spied me one day at an afternoon tea, and walked right across the room towards me. I had my glass up, so I saw her coming. I put it down, and looked the other way; but she would make me know her. 'I think we have the pleasure of each other's acquaintance,' said she. 'By-the-by, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, when last we met, you were trying to catch some high notes; have you been trying to catch them ever since?' She meant," continued Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone—as if the meaning were not clear enough—"she meant it was I who went wrong in the duet, and might practise for ever and not be right! I came to the conclusion she must mean that, and could mean nothing else. Rigardy thinks so too, and cuts Mrs Clerico, no matter where he meets her."

The excitement and volubility of Jumping Georgy astonished and amused me. The impudence of the "woman with a following" was delightful. I laughed so heartily that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, who had never seen me laugh before, put up her eye-glass, put it down again, grew nervous, turned red, and looked as if she thought I might be laughing at her. She had been telling her story standing over me. When I laughed, she went back to her chair, stepping very high. Jumping Georgy's impulsive, abrupt feelings have a way of showing themselves in all her movements. Her discomfort and annoyance seek expression

in every limb, and even work themselves into the tail of her dress; they rustle and twist in her skirt. My cousin's wife sat with her eye-glass fixed permanently upon me. The eye-glass sobered me. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was silent; she did not seem to have another word to say.

I wondered if she were in the habit of catching high notes with the Baron von Klammerhammer's eye-glass and tiptoes. I remembered once hearing her sing with them, so I thought I should like to know the Drill-sergeant's opinion of the distinguished foreigner. I thought the opinion any one amateur singer held of another must be worth hearing.

"Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone," said I, "the Baron von Klammerhammer is to sing with Miss Elmer-Elmer and Mrs Clerico."

She softened at Mein Herr von Klammerhammer's name. "The Baron! poor dear old creature! I only do wonder how he can keep on singing with that Miss Elmer—for he really does know how to sing. The Baron has method," continued the Drill-sergeant, in a tone of decision—"he has method. He brings out his voice from the right place."

"A pity he has so little of it left in the right place, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone! He will soon have to stand on his tiptoes and look for it with his eye-glass in the wrong one."

"I don't know what you mean, Sophy"—every one calls me Sophy—"I don't know what you mean; but I do know I would rather sing with the Baron than

with any one in town. He is a perfectly tractable man—perfectly, and does not drown your voice with his own shakes and flourishes, like that conceited Reginald Meltem. The Baron is an artist—a perfect artist. Not like Lord Studhorsey, who sings to himself, and expects you to sing to him also."

"By the way, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, they are to have his little lordship at Mineham: he is to sing with himself, and with Miss Elmer-Elmer too."

"Well, I do declare! How that Mrs Elmer does run after him! She is set upon catching him for Miss Ermyntrude."

"It was not Mrs Elmer-Elmer," I said; "it was Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart who caught Lord Studhorsey. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart has the sole management of the concert and the singers."

"Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart!" repeated Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone in astonishment. "Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart! Why, she does not know one tune from another. How on earth can she undertake to organise a concert?"

I answered that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would undertake to organise anything, in this world or the next.

"It is Maria Warbattle Lady Arabella ought to have had," insisted the Drill-sergeant, as if there could not be a doubt on the subject. "Maria is perfectly invaluable: she can manage everything, and accompany every one, and never wants to sing herself. Had Lady Arabella consulted me, I should have taken over

Maria Warbattle to Mineham. We could have arranged everything, and have imported no one. The idea of importing a pack of strangers! Positive insult to the county!"

A wicked imp tempted me, and I said, "Although you are not taking part in the concert, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, I presume you and Miss Warbattle will drive over to Mineham to-morrow, for the afternoon, just to hear what sort of *fiasco* they all make of the affair?"

"Not a step of the way shall we go," cried the Drill-sergeant, reddening. She jumped up from her chair; the chair fell back with a rattle. "Not a step of the way shall we go. Never was more astounded than by Lady Arabella's gaucheness. The notion of asking me to take guinea tickets to hear that Miss Elmer sing *solfeggi!*"

The notion was nearly too much for my gravity, so I was delighted to hear Jumping Georgy bid me a sudden, abrupt good-bye.

"Remember me to Rigardy-Wrenstone," said I.

"Thankee!" said she.

"How terrible," I exclaimed, when my visitor was half-way down the avenue,—"how terrible a misfortune it is to be a woman without a following!"

On my return to the solemn study, Uncle Sherbrook appeared to be rather shocked at the lively, laughing look of me. The fact is, I had spent a very pleasant half-hour with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone:

she had amused me, and I was unaccustomed to be amused.

To my surprise, I felt I liked Jumping Georgy,—there was so much human nature about her. Her feelings were undisguised, and she did not wrap up her faults in texts of Scripture.

CHAPTER IX.

In due time Thomas told Snipkins, Snipkins told Aunt Jane, and Aunt Jane told Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, that Thomas had told Snipkins "the master and Miss Sophy had lived in the study during the mistress's absence."

George and Thomas also told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane, who told Mrs Stewart, that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had paid me a long visit the very day my aunt left home.

These two bits of news displeased the admirable Catherine. She was more particularly put out at hearing Thomas said the master and Miss Sophy had lived in the study during the mistress's absence.

Mrs Stewart asked me if, by any chance, Uncle Sherbrook had read me his will? I said he had, but firmly refused to tell her what was in it. I knew she could not bear to think the Reverend James might be my uncle's heir.

From this time forth I discovered Mrs Stewart tried to make Aunt Jane even more jealous of me than she was by nature. My aunt was a sieve through whom

all things filtered. "Do you know, Sophy, Catherine thinks you quite a dangerous person; and she says . . ." and then I had the full benefit of Catherine's private opinion of me. These confidential communications amused and enlightened me, like the *asides* in a play. If I had not had a clue to the plot, Mrs Stewart's civility would have puzzled me. To become dangerous in some people's eyes, is to seem of a certain importance. Never before had I known the admirable Catherine so polite.

Her politeness must have cost her a great effort, for she had many irritations on her nerves. She discovered that during her collecting tour and attendance on Gordon-Sherbrook's lung, my aunt and uncle had managed to fall into good-fellowship with their neighbours. When Mrs Stewart started northwards, the Rector had behaved in a very rude manner: he had quite disgraced himself by a scandalous exhibition of temper; he was a cross, censorious, violent man, and a hypocrite; while his wife was the weak and overdressed mother of his badly brought-up children—and worse, the granddaughter of Jack Jones.

Not long after Mrs Stewart's return south, the Rector came uninvited to luncheon, and brought Mary and the two elder boys with him. We were all on the best of terms. What a sight for the admirable Catherine's eyes! What a worry for her jealous temper! How had this great change taken place? When James, and Mary, and the boys walked into

the dining-room, Mrs Stewart cast a look upon me which seemed to ask, was this my doing?

So, little by little, with one jealous worry and another, and more especially on finding Aunt Jane had given her village subscriptions to the Rector, Mrs Stewart took to tatting the steeple in a frenzy. Her nervous fingers made one restless; her voice, raised above and penetrating beyond the click of her shuttle, scraped one's nerves; and then that voice was always jarring on some one string, scratching a hymn on catgut. No matter how unchristian the mischief-making, it was sure to be set in some pious key. When the subject harped upon was in itself of a religious nature, the best of women had great scope for damning her neighbour charitably. When Mrs Stewart scraped day by day upon the doctrine and duties of a clergyman of the evangelical Church of England, it was a hymn edifying to Aunt Jane that she scratched upon this one everlasting string. The "thin end of the wedge" has always been a grating subject to my temper, principally from the way it seems to have of boring eternally. There are imaginations which, having once seized upon that wedge, can give the thin end no rest, nor it them.

Aunt Jane was at home in any one groove of mind. She felt no disgust at hearing Mrs Stewart each day discuss the Rector and his wife, his children, and the thin end of the edge; on the contrary, the regular recurrence of the topic became a habit, and, therefore, an expected pleasure to her vacant mind. It suited

Aunt Jane to have ideas and words laid down flat before her with a gate at the end, like her own avenues, in order that she might pace backwards and forwards upon them, taking about the same number of turns each day.

But my aunt, good, blind soul! is kind at heart, so the pleasure of the habit would not have lasted could she have seen the ruin of the poor clergyman's prospects which lay maliciously rolled-up in the admirable Catherine's texts of Scripture and religious zeal and anxiety for the Sherbrooks' spiritual welfare.

I have not patience to follow, day by day, the growth of prejudice in Aunt Jane's mind, and the hourly labour of Mrs Stewart in a vineyard which was not the Lord's. It irritates me to write about what irritated me to feel. Many of the small miseries and tiffs, and drawn-out insignificant botherations, I have already described in this my trivial life, have greatly teased my pen; but really, the spun-out details of Mrs Stewart's daily intrigues worry its impatience beyond endurance, so that it cannot write of them. It is enough to say that, after six months' slow, pettifogging perseverance, my aunt was thoroughly prejudiced by Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart against the poor Rector and his wife and children.

It is not difficult to persuade an elderly lady who has completely forgotten her own youth, that the old Adam has been born again, and is growing up amongst a set of tree-climbing children with high spirits; and it was an easy matter to find fault with Mary Sher-

brook, for she happened to be the wrong person in the wrong place. Yet had she been in the right place, she was just the sort of woman half the world admires —pretty, delicate, soft, asking sympathy from all men and from most women. Fancy her with plenty of money, efficient servants, clever governesses,—a dear, sweet creature, so well-dressed. "Goes to the best dressmakers, and always has stockings, gloves, and bonnet to match her gown. Such nice taste, you know! such a charming eye for knick-knacks and old china! Her own room quite a *bijou!* china plates all over the walls, and a knot of pink ribbons to every plate and picture. The freshest curtains, the most lovely pink satin coverlet to her bed, and a pink satin dressing-gown trimmed with real lace!" I think I hear her lady friends say, "She never wears any but real lace," as if to wear real lace were the highest sort of virtue!

I can imagine Mary Sherbrook in pink satin and real lace, and her girls and boys in fancy costume, all with their hair cut short before and in long curls behind—the big boys "just like pictures, you know! Such beautiful hair! quite interesting children! And the governess never lets them be in the way." And I can also hear the charming little lady praised to the skies.

Circumstances had not made Mary Sherbrook, but nature had; and talent or strength of character is required to make people what nature did not make them: amiable incapacity, very blind and a little vain, must die as it was born, and from no fault of its own.

Harefield considered Mary Sherbrook to be one of those pretty dears whom Providence had clearly intended for a strong-minded, efficient husband. It is true, the Reverend James's mother-in-law declared Providence had made her daughter's match; but Harefield believed Providence had nothing to say to it, and the Rector's mother-in-law a great deal. I once heard Aunt Jane wonder "if really, after all, Catherine, Providence did intend James to marry another sort of wife; because why, then, did James marry Mary?"—and Mrs Stewart reply, with intense conviction, "Mrs Sherbrook, even Providence can be outwitted by a matchmaking mother!" I never forgot this queer answer: it was an odd remark for a lady mixing amongst the saints of this world who are the salt thereof, and not, I had thought, the intriguing mothers thereof. But what did I know of the pious ladies who get up bazaars solely for the benefit of the Blacks? It is true I did not know them, and Mrs Stewart did.

I began, like the rest of Harefield, by being quite sure Providence had intended Mary for a strong-minded husband; I ended by thinking Providence had perhaps more to say to the match than Harefield would allow. Mary Sherbrook is just the woman who might tease to death a clear-headed, strong-willed husband; the man would expect her to lean entirely on his strength. Now, though Mary is ever seeking protection, she only puts one hand in yours, and, like the child she is, keeps the other free to play with

her favourite toy. Mary leans on your arm, but turns her eyes and thoughts upon the gown she holds up in one hand. Caring for her pretty dress, seeing only her pretty dress, she likes to take her time, and would not like to run at a rough husband's pace. When hurried, such women cry, and think the man a monster, although his haste may be towards great things, and his time their bread. If women like Mary cry, they seem to think their tears have put them in the right—as if you could weep away reason and good sense! Their tears do not really melt these fine hard rocks: but they think they do—they feel as if they did; and their feeling is their obstinate conviction, and their obstinacy is a dull dead weight, not to be fought with or pricked into life,—a lump of lead strong men are maddened to find they cannot drag along.

There is a sort of woman all softness and tears, who will not refuse to walk with you on the muddy road she mildly hates, yet she will drag upon your arm and weigh you down till night falls, and you are driven to seek rest in a hovel by the way. Her dulled eyes can never see the goal you fain would reach.

Thinking thus—for there were odd moments on the back avenue when I could think—I grew to believe, although doubtless there are weak women made especially for strong men, and strong wives for weak husbands, that yet again there are weak women for weak men, as there are strong men to whom strength is a necessity, because leaning, dragging, unyielding weakness maddens them. So I came to think that in

the Rector's marriage, perhaps (for once!) an intriguing mother was not permitted to upset the designs of Providence.

What enraged the ordering, ever-arranging Mrs Stewart with Mary Sherbrook, was not that she found the doll soft, but that there were places where your thumb made no impression on the wax. If you got Mary into your hands, she would take up your "views," she would talk like you, she would even walk like you; but preach to her for ever, and she would buy pretty things without money, and would not give up one yard of pink ribbon for the education of her boys. Maybe the boys were a little backward; but they really did not want to go to school as soon as other children, for they were certainly clever, and Mary was quite sure they would do well in life. Reason with her, she would cry; but no tears could ever melt the wax in that spot.

Mrs Stewart did not advise Aunt Jane to ask Uncle Sherbrook to educate the elder boys at his own expense. It was more for her own interest that she should rasp for ever on Mary's one untunable string, until she deceived Aunt Jane's ear, and persuaded her the whole instrument was false. The admirable Catherine deafened her dear Mrs Sherbrook with one sound, on the same principle that she engrossed her sight by holding up the thin end of the wedge right before her eyes, thus shutting out the Rector's natural shape till Aunt Jane could only see that wedge, and not at all the human being, the good clergyman, the

needy hard-working man, her husband's rightful heir and her own kind friend.

Slow as the Rector was to notice neglect or take offence, he did at length perceive that he and his wife and children were no longer very welcome at Sherbrook Hall. From a remark which filtered through Mrs Stewart's sieve to me, I rather imagine the best of women simplified matters by giving James and Mary a hint to stay away: half a hint would keep a delicate gentleman like the Rector at a distance.

Mrs Stewart managed there should be neither quarrel nor intimacy between the rectory and the Hall. When Aunt Jane would think she really ought to go and visit Mary, the admirable Catherine would put off the visit, or else accompany my aunt herself. If the passive Mary's long-suffering silence happened to make a good impression upon Aunt Jane in Mrs Stewart's presence, the best of women perceived it instantly, and talked it and tatted it away.

As for me, I found, to my intense disgust, that, no matter what I did or said in the poor Sherbrooks' favour, I only increased my aunt's prejudice, so entirely had Mrs Stewart and Snipkins convinced her that Sophy was always in the wrong, though Sophy always thought everybody else in the wrong.

"Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane," I said, "why do you let yourself drift into a state of prejudice against James and Mary Sherbrook? They have never been unkind relations to you. Make sure you have good reason to turn an old friendship into enmity, and at least do not

change without knowing you are changing, and wherefore." My aunt seemed to think I had accused her of a great sin.

"Change!" she exclaimed, with lively indignation; "I never change to any one, and you know that perfectly well, Sophy; but you always accuse me of everything; and you even think I walk over the flower-beds, and you say I made the damp mound in the garden, though your uncle made it, and though it gives me my death of cold; but you always like arguing, and your poor dear mother liked it; so argue to your heart's content, for I won't argue any more."

The natural effect of this vague, indefinite estrangement with the rectory, was to throw Mary Sherbrook entirely into the determined hands of Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and to make Mary's "views" and worsted-work be taken more than ever after the Drill-sergeant's own pattern.

Could Aunt Jane have reflected, she would have seen her conduct must inevitably drive the Reverend James to agree more and more with the female rector and the Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone. It was in the man's nature to agree with some one.

Great changes rarely take place in twenty-four hours. If you open your eyes each morning and see just a little change to-day and just a little to-morrow, nothing surprises you at the end of six months. But if you sleep for half a year, and then open your eyes, you are astounded at the great change which stares you, like unlooked-for treason, in the face.

Mrs Stewart, for reasons best known to herself, had managed that Aunt Jane should not be much in the study or otherwise alone with Uncle Sherbrook, so my aunt had had very little opportunity of putting ideas drop by drop into her husband's head. "Dear Edward" was absorbed in his own affairs: his thoughts were with Jones and Buggle. He never really listened to his wife; and it was only when they were a great deal together, that the constant repetition of one subject caught his attention. As a rule, he was quite content her general remarks should be unintelligible to him; he asked for no explanation, because he dreaded the length and obscurity of the answer. He would say to me—"Your aunt is fond of talking; listen to her, Sophy. I am engaged upon important business."

When the Rigardy-Wrenstones were the officiating clergy of Harefield, my uncle had himself perceived the thin end of the wedge poking into the parish. But he had warned James. Whenever James and Mary came to luncheon, my uncle had found James ready to agree with all his own moderate views, and Mary had never contradicted him in her life. No wonder Uncle Sherbrook felt theologically safe! He sat in his study, wrote to his attorney and to my attorney, and did not let the thin end of the wedge at the rectory trouble his preoccupied brain. He noticed nothing.

Once, only once, did I hear him say he was surprised James and Mary never came to luncheon now.

My lips were open, but Mrs Stewart cut the words from me with her sharp tongue, and cleverly launched Aunt Jane into vagueness and the thin end of the wedge. As my aunt was unintelligible without a clue, and very voluble, my uncle said he could not loiter any longer on the front avenue, for he had business with a man at the other end of the village.

Conceive, then, Uncle Sherbrook's feelings, when, having slept a good half-year, awaking, he looked up one day and came face to face with the Rector in a coat as long as Noah's of the wooden ark—a coat with the mark of the Beast on it—and a waistcoat the imagination could button to the Pope's own chin!

My uncle's puzzled amazement opened his ears to his wife's rigmaroles, and made him willing to hear Mrs Stewart's opinion of James's Ritualistic uniform. The admirable Catherine had her say and sowed her own seed with an air of aggrieved piety. Had it not been for Mrs Stewart and Aunt Jane, Uncle Sherbrook would have gone straight off to the rectory. The Rigardy-Wrenstones were away; so I am sure that, before long, that stumbling-block, the Ritualistic coat, would have been sent back to the Pope. I am certain the best of women's clear dark eyes perceived this possibility; so she cleverly persuaded my uncle to avoid the rectory, and leave to his own devices a man who had deceived him—for what else had James Sherbrook done? Had he not always agreed with my uncle? Yet, while he appeared to agree, he must in reality have disagreed with him. Such treason

wounded my uncle, for he had liked his cousin and had trusted him. The clever Catherine had that sort of penetration which divines the injured place: by pressing on that spot, she could make it an open wound. She first showed Uncle Sherbrook where James's conduct had hurt him, and then made that hurt into a sore.

Uncle Sherbrook sought no interview with his cousin, but avoided him. So the Rector wore the long coat, never suspecting his old friend considered the Pope to be his tailor.

The ordinary Harefield Christian saw no sudden change in the services of the parish church or in the doctrine of the Rector. But from the moment the clergyman's coat lengthened, the Sherbrooks, being led by the orthodox Catherine, saw the thick end of the wedge growing thicker every Sunday. I did not see it. Then, it is true, when I went to church, I was much occupied in trying to say my prayers. I said them whenever I could. I say, whenever I could, because I sat next Aunt Jane in the square pew, and her behaviour was a constant interruption. She repeated every word of the service and lessons in my ear; she shook her head; she said the responses very slowly and in a loud voice, and finished her verse of the Psalms during the clergyman's. Not unfrequently my aunt would read the prayers with the Rector in a loud undertone, putting strong emphasis where he put none. In the responses, her voice clashed with the clerk's, for she never would follow old Tom. Then,

during the sermon, if the doctrine were unsound, she groaned; if sound, she sighed.

Each Sabbath, Aunt Jane groaned more and more: by the kind help of Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, the marks of the Beast grew clearer and clearer. At length, on Easter Sunday, the Beast himself became visible in the elaborate decorations of the church. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had appeared in Harefield, and had decorated the altar and the church to her own satisfaction; and, indeed, to Mary Sherbrook's also, for Mary is exactly the kind of woman to whom church millinery must ever be a delight—a sort of sanctification of her own millinery instincts! I said so to Aunt Jane, and said it was nature, and not solely Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, who had made Mary thus; but I only convinced my aunt that no one could be more unsound than Sophy — Sophy's views of everything were always dreadful; "and really, Sophy, you shock me! because you seem to take Mary's part, although you heard Catherine telling me yesterday that Mary was delighted with James's coat, and was not a bit grieved about it, but thought it became James, and made him look taller; and indeed, Catherine says, when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone ordered it, she and Mary gave James no peace till he wore it every day; and you know all this, Sophy, and still you dare to defend Mary."

"I do not defend," said I, "but I explain. Aunt Jane, Mary likes what she has been created to like. It is the actual coat, and no particular dogma or

doctrine, she admires. She would like to see her husband in a picturesque hat, with a cardinal's tassels falling over the brim; and she would like him to wear a cassock, and purple stockings, and shoe-buckles; and she would put a broad sash round his waist, and black bands with white edges round his neck; and she would tonsure the crown of his head, and have him look an ascetic priest with big eyes."

A cry of horror from Aunt Jane told me I was following my imagination too far. I had some difficulty in reassuring my aunt, and getting her to believe she might go to church the following Sunday and not see the appalling figure I had described. But, to my great surprise, I found Aunt Jane was doubtful about going to Harefield Church at all next Sabbath. "If the weather looks showery, we may go there," said she.

"Dear me, Aunt Jane!" I exclaimed, "it is odd to be more religious in wet weather than in fine. It is generally the contrary—people go to church on a fine Sunday, and stay at home on a wet one."

"You do not understand, Sophy," replied my aunt, "because you never do seem to understand anything; still you ought to know your uncle would not take the horses all the way to Klipton if it seemed likely to be a showery day."

"To Klipton!" I cried—"to Klipton!"

I then discovered that for some time past dear Catherine had strongly advised my uncle and aunt to take an empty pew there was in Klipton Church.

I knew Catherine had driven the mule to Klipton the last two Sundays.

"Catherine is delighted with Mr Thunderbore," said my aunt, "and she heard him preach an excellent sermon on the golden vessels of the Tabernacle, and she quite agreed with Lady Arabella in thinking him the soundest preacher at this side of the county; and Catherine says his style is forcible, but that he never startles you, because he always says just what you expect him to say; and Catherine says there are no really sound preachers in Votlingham, although Votlingham might be more convenient for putting up the horses, and Robert would like it better. At first your uncle said he would not take the horses to Klipton; but Catherine has heard of an excellent stable, so on Easter Sunday, Edward told Catherine we should go there in future whenever it is fine; because, Sophy, you see there is no Ritualism, or mummery, or High Church hymnal at Klipton." My aunt sighed and shook her curls. "Mr Thunderbore," sighed she, "sings the Gospel."

If this gossip is divided into four Vols.
This chapter should be the first of Volume
three.

Book III

CHAPTER X.

KLIPTON is four miles and a half from Sherbrook Hall, and exactly the same distance from Mineham. Lady Arabella "sat under" the Rev. Mr Thunderbore.

On our arrival in church, we generally found Lady Arabella and Mr Scott seated in the large square pew opposite ours, at the other side of the aisle.

We left home very early, yet were constantly on the verge of being late for the wicked man. My uncle did not really like taking the horses to Klipton. Not that he objected, as one might suppose, to driving to church on a fine Sunday: he had always done so, and his father had driven into Harefield before him. I think, when he drove to Harefield, he felt, from long habit, that he was doing his duty, and taking the horses to church as well as Robert. But he had none of this feeling about driving to Klipton; and, moreover, he thought the road a hilly one. With the exception of a slight rise near the church, I could not see the hills; but then I never even perceived the Simplon.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had conceived so great an admiration for Mr Thunderbore, that she suffered from

spiritual starvation when she did not hear him preach. Now it was all very fine, in a case of urgent spiritual necessity, for Mrs Stewart to take out the mule once in a way on a Sunday; but she never, never would do so as a rule! She therefore asked my aunt for a seat in our carriage. Thank heaven, she did not tatt at us! but she took up a great deal of room, as she was most particular in not permitting her dress to be crushed.

The first Sunday we drove to Klipton, my uncle sat next me on the back seat crumpled up as small as possible. Uncle Sherbrook liked to get out of the carriage whenever he imagined we were coming to a hill. He would say his legs were stiff, and would walk slowly along the road, stopping every now and then to behead a weed: he would thus keep the horses at a walk, and give them a rest on the sly. This trick of resting the horses on the sly, when there was a carriageful of ladies, was one of my uncle's time-honoured and most cherished peculiarities; and he was much annoyed to find he could not get in and out of the carriage without tripping in Mrs Stewart's skirt, and getting a very black look from her besides.

The following Sunday my uncle sent Thomas to sit by Snipkins in the dickey, and sat himself on the box, from whence he had an uninterrupted view of the hills. After this he always sat on the box, and each Sunday he and Robert saw the hills more clearly than the Sunday before. Uncle Sherbrook would walk half the way to Klipton, and keep us standing on the

road while he dawdled purposely behind. No wonder Aunt Jane addled one's brain by repeating incessantly that she knew we should be late!

I detested this weekly dawdle on the Klipton road: the tediousness of all this snailing and stopping irritated me more than I can tell. The drive seemed endless,—even longer than Mr Thunderbore's sermon. I would beg to be allowed to get out and walk, but Mrs Stewart would not hear of such a monstrous thing. "Sophy will bungle out of the carriage all twisted up in my tail, and then she will bungle in again with muddy boots and dirty our dresses, Mrs Sherbrook."

When at last we got to church, I am glad to say Aunt Jane thoroughly approved of Mr Thunderbore's doctrine; and when we came out of church, she much enjoyed the agreeable chat she would have with Lady Arabella. Instead of a stray *Thankee* or a snub from Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and a snub or a glorification of condescension from her nephew, my aunt had a very pleasant weekly gossip in Klipton churchyard. Lady Arabella was really fond of society, and the most friendly and talkative of women. She and Aunt Jane sat on a raised flat tombstone, and talked while waiting for their carriages, and in no hurry for them to come. Lady Arabella's old-fashioned chariot generally arrived first. She put up her horses at a greater distance from the church than we did ours, but then her coachman went out just before the extreme end of Mr Thunderbore's discourse, while Robert stayed to hear the last word.

When Lady Arabella met Aunt Jane in the porch, the two ladies invariably began to talk about the sermon; but they were not seated on the tombstone before Lady Arabella had branched off into her favourite topics of who married whom, and what his father left him, and what fortune she had, and whose daughter she was, and what relation everybody was to everybody else, and of how there were families claiming to be connected with others of the same name when it was well known there was no acknowledged connection between them, and of how in some authenticated cases people had even borne the family title where they had no right to it at all. "And there was that very curious instance in the Dumbledore family . . ." and Lady Arabella would look much shocked and much pleased, and would lower her voice to a whisper. I would take the hint, and walk away.

Uncle Sherbrook was never present to interrupt my lady's little Sunday stories, for he always came out of church in a great fuss about the horses: he wondered what on earth delayed Robert, and thought something must have happened, and went down the road to meet the carriage.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would be quite engaged talking to Mr David Scott. She monopolised him in the civilest and most flattering manner imaginable.

I was glad there was no one left for me to talk to. The churchyard and the sorrows written upon the gravestones inclined me to be silent. But indeed I should have hesitated in a much livelier place before

I inflicted myself upon a stranger. I remembered how I had bored Mr Scott long ago, and that was when the old Adam within me was still in good spirits. And now I felt I had become dull of wit and heavy-minded, without conversation or spirit. When women are shut up, and neither marry nor go into the world amongst poor or rich, they grow unnaturally shy and dull: they are no longer what nature made them, but what the repression and the depression of near relations forces them to become.

As Mr and Mrs Thunderbore passed through the churchyard, they spoke to Lady Arabella and Aunt Jane, but did not remain many minutes, because the homely Mrs Thunderbore always felt very anxious her husband should eat his Sunday dinner while it was hot. When the Thunderbores had disappeared through the wicket into the parsonage, my aunt and Lady Arabella resumed their seat on the tombstone and their former conversation. I marvelled it never seemed to strike them it was rather odd for two ladies of serious views to sit Sunday after Sunday gossiping upon a tombstone. I really believe they quite forgot the convenient slab hid a grave. I would look and wonder, and tell myself there was no sense in the pain the lively talking voices gave me; for what is the whole world, I would think, but a tomb? and what are all the pleasure-loving, witty, laughing people but jesters in a graveyard? Our buried friends are no more here than in our ball-room or dining-room. Our dead are in heaven or in hell, and only a little

dust lies here, and a few crumbling bones that we would shrink from, and not love but hate. Still, reason as I might, the thought of all the joy and yearning love buried with bitter tears in the graves around me, made me feel the churchyard to be a holy place sanctified by the agony of many a mourner.

The look of Lady Arabella, decidedly rouged and bewigged, gossiping on a tombstone, filled me with all sorts of sad and grotesque ideas. I thought her just the figure for an allegory of human life; yet indeed, wrinkled vanity seated upon a tombstone and forgetting the grave would be a true picture of life, and no allegory at all.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would be in quite a good temper and much less touchy about her dress while driving home. In the afternoon, when tired of Aunt Jane's transitions and the Commentary, she would even talk to me, as if almost pleased with me.

The admirable Catherine never failed to keep her own copy of Dr MacShaw's blessed work open in her hand on a Sabbath afternoon while she gossiped to me; so it was betwixt the leaves of the Commentary, as it were, that I used to hear all about Lady Arabella and Mr David Scott and their private affairs.

Mrs Stewart told me Mr Scott was Lady Arabella's nephew by marriage, the only child of her late husband's second brother. This brother was a dashing soldier, and had but little money to begin with. He spent that little, and then married a lady who had none. The penniless couple had one son. The mother

died of a fever, and the father was killed in the Crimea. Lady Arabella had no child, so she took the boy, dressed him in fancy costume, and was very kind to him. The boy was just thirteen years of age, when it happened that Lord Clinchfisted perceived all of a sudden that he had no son of his own, and that his young cousin David Scott might some day be his heir. The Earl of Clinchfisted sent the boy to Eton and Oxford, and allowed him £800 a-year when he left college.

Mrs Stewart said Lady Arabella told her Mr David Scott was considered wonderfully clever at Oxford, and that it was well known he might easily have taken a first class had he wished it; but he did not wish it, and did not go in for honours, and only took a common degree. He was a capital oar, a first-rate whip, and an eloquent speaker at the Union. Lord Clinchfisted went up to Oxford during Mr Scott's last term, and heard his young cousin make a very glib speech on the right of primogeniture, and on the fatal consequences of frittering amongst younger branches of a family the wealth which is the power of an aristocracy; and Lord Clinchfisted thought the speech one of the most sensible he had ever heard a young fellow make. The consequence was, that some nine months afterwards, when the Liberal member for Clinchton got *delirium tremens*, Lord Clinchfisted advised Mr David Scott to stand for the borough in the Conservative interest, promising to pay the expenses of a contested election. Mr Scott was returned

at the head of the poll. The Earl kept his promise: he had a large sum to pay, and yet he increased his cousin's allowance to £1000 a-year.

It seems Mr Scott's maiden speech at Westminster proved a success, and Mrs Stewart told me he was beginning to think "the House" the pleasantest club in the world, when old Lady Clinchfisted most perversely took it into her head to die. Within a year my lord was married to a very handsome young lady—a bridegroom of sixty to a bride of eighteen. Within another year a son and heir was born.

While the bonfires were still alight in honour of this great event, there was a general election. Mr Scott went down to Clinchton, perfectly certain he had only to show himself to be re-elected. He soon found his mistake. There was a sharp contest for the borough. The old Liberal member had left the asylum in good spirits and restored to health. This wealthy distiller was a popular man, and his had been an illness which excites more sympathy north of the Tweed than south. Mr David Scott lost his seat. Neither Lord Clinchfisted nor his agent had troubled himself to canvass in his favour.

"I know nothing of our electoral laws," said Mrs Stewart, "and I am ignorant of what exactly constitutes bribery; but I am quite sure, from what I have seen and heard, that a certain amount of whiskey is legal in a Scotch election."

She told me Mr Scott referred the numerous claims made upon him to Lord Clinchfisted's agent. The

agent referred them to his lordship ; whereupon my lord wrote a very stiff letter to his cousin, telling him plainly he had no right whatever to expect his debts to be paid by the head of the family. However, my lord graciously condescended to say that, for the honour of the family name, he would this once bear the expenses of his cousin's defeat. In order to do so more conveniently, Lord Clinchfisted intimated he would stop Mr Scott's allowance, adding that, much as he might regret it, he could not in future continue that or any other allowance, without prejudice to his son's interest.

"How well I remember Lord Clinchfisted's letter!" said Mrs Stewart; "it made poor dear Lady Arabella quite ill, and she stayed in bed for a week with all the blinds pulled down. She got such a shock, that she had not even the energy to—to——" Mrs Stewart hesitated—"to have her hair dressed. You see, Sophy," she continued, "David Scott was a perfect beggar. Lady Arabella has only an annuity and Mineham for life. At her death, her own fortune reverts to her family, and everything else goes to her brother-in-law. He is her husband's youngest brother, and never would have been left the fortune, only her husband made sure his nephew David was to have a title and £30,000 a-year, and he did not want Mineham to be swallowed up in the Clinchfisted estates."

I thought Mr Scott had been hardly used by fate, and treated cruelly by Lord Clinchfisted.

"And what did poor Mr David Scott do, Mrs

Stewart?" I asked, now really interested, and moved by the idea of so great a change of fortune.

"What could he do? Lady Arabella can only allow him £200 a-year, though she has sold her house in London, and merely takes one for the season. He was too old for the army."

"I tell you what he could have done, Catherine," exclaimed Aunt Jane, awaking from her copy of the Commentary—"I tell you what he could have done: as he is such a clever man, and indeed quite a genius, he could have got the Carlton Club to return him to Parliament,—for every one says the Carlton Club is only too delighted to return any man of genius, and to pay all his expenses; and then, Catherine, when David Scott was once more in Parliament, he could have made a very, very clever speech, and he would have been a Minister before long. I remember when I was young, my mother (your grandmother, Sophy) used to read out the lives of great men—people like —like—what was the name of that celebrated Minister who——well, you are most provoking, Sophy, for you never remember anything; and if I forget any little fact or name in history, you never can help me. But it does not matter who he was, Catherine; for I recollect quite distinctly he was Prime Minister in the second chapter, and all the rest of the book was about foreign wars."

"My dear Mrs Sherbrook!" cried Mrs Stewart, "I cannot imagine who your great man was! But ten thousand to one, he married some sort of an heiress."

"No, no," replied Aunt Jane; "there was nothing about an heiress or about his wife at all; for I am sure I should remember about his wife, as I always remember about people's wives and children."

"Even Canning," insisted Mrs Stewart, "married an heiress. And nowadays, if you have nothing of your own, you would have to marry two—kill the first, and marry a second. My dear Mrs Sherbrook, a man must have money: Conservative politics are too expensive for a poor man. David Scott must marry an heiress. Indeed, Lady Arabella says there is nothing else for him to do."

"Then why does not he marry an heiress?" asked my aunt; "he might fall in love with her just as well as with a lady who has no fortune. I am sure Edward would have fallen in love with me just the same if I had had a very large fortune; because I know it was myself he liked, and I should have been the same person if I had been richer."

My aunt looked pleased at the brilliancy of her own logic.

"Oh, my dear Mrs Sherbrook!" cried Mrs Stewart, laughing—"my dear Mrs Sherbrook, how innocent you are! Heiresses are not to be found nowadays waiting at the cross-roads. You have far to drive when you have not four horses! A man who has not a penny, or a title, or an expectation in the world, stays at home, and does not go courting an heiress on foot, without a single feather in his cap! Besides, when David Scott had a chance, you know Louisa Clarcke

spoilt his prospects. You know, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, how outrageously she flirted with him when that first baby died. Lady Clarcke encouraged him, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone quite took him up: the Rigardy-Wrenstones thought they should like to have a countess for a cousin. David Scott and Louisa were regularly engaged."

"What baby died?" I asked; for Aunt Jane seemed to know all about it. Mrs Stewart told me the Clinchfisted child, whose birth was Mr Scott's ruin, had died in early infancy. She gave me the date of its death, and I remember thinking it occurred just about the time of my first ball.

"But another son was born again in no time," said the admirable Catherine, in a tone of disgust; "and it has not the slightest intention of dying!"

The third or fourth Sunday that we went to Klipton Church, I thought Lady Arabella looking less cheerful than usual. It was not fancy on my part, for Aunt Jane had hardly taken her seat in the carriage, when she exclaimed—

"Poor dear Lady Arabella! she is quite in low spirits, Catherine, because the Clinchfisteds have another son."

"What!" cried Mrs Stewart; "two sons? and both alive together! Well, really Lady Clarcke is not to be blamed,—for, as Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone says, circumstances have changed; and when Mr. Tankney is paying Louisa such marked attention, it would be madness not to break with David Scott."

The following Sunday morning, Uncle Sherbrook was much perturbed in humour and appetite; for, on tapping the barometer, it fell. The morning looked bright, and Aunt Jane was sure the weather would be fine; but Uncle Sherbrook finally had his own way, and settled we were to have a showery day. So we went to Harefield Church. We had to drive round by Riverbank to pick up Mrs Stewart. The bell had stopped when we arrived at the church-door. My uncle went first up the narrow staircase which led to our side of the gallery. Ever since my uncle's mother had restored the old church many long years ago, the gallery had been divided into two large square pews—the one belonging to the Abbey, and the other to the Hall. There was a passage between and behind them, and a little wooden staircase at each end of the gallery, which encircled the church-tower and met in the porch.

I happened to be following close upon Uncle Sherbrook's steps. He stopped at the top of the staircase. Never shall I forget the expression of his countenance! I thought he had come face to face with Beelzebub! And so he had, and with Beelzebub seated in his own pew! Lord Tankney, a good many gentlemen, and a few gaily dressed ladies, completely filled Uncle Sherbrook's pew. Not one of the party offered to move, or even to make room. Rigardy-Wrenstone leant over the side of his pew and beckoned to Uncle Sherbrook with that indescribable air of elation he sometimes puts on. My uncle went for-

ward. Denis spoke to him in a low voice. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone looked up through her eye-glass from the harmonium. Uncle Sherbrook gave no answer. He walked straight down the stairs at the other side of the gallery. In following him, I looked round and saw Aunt Jane all in a flurry shaking her curls, and Mrs Stewart, both ushered by Denis into the Abbey pew. I did not turn back, but followed Uncle Sherbrook. I had sympathy with him, for I knew my cousin and the expression of his face well enough to guess what he had done. I had a contempt for such petty spite.

Uncle Sherbrook said he was going home, but bade me stay in church and sit down-stairs. He spoke in a peremptory voice, but in no unkindly one.

I sat near the door, so I was amongst the first to leave. I waited in the carriage for Mrs Stewart and Aunt Jane. My aunt came alone. She was overflowing on the subject of the Abbey pew.

"Sophy, I have not sat there since I was married. I knew Denis had come down from town for Whitsuntide, but I never thought he would ask me into his pew. But then, Sophy, how could I think the Tankneys would sit in our pew? Something very queer must have happened; and I wonder old Tom let any one sit in our pew—and Edward will be very angry with him."

I saw Denis with his hands full of Tankney prayer-books, and Lord Tankney carrying Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's hymnal with the large gold cross on the

outside. Denis walked between two ladies of the Tankney party, while Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone seemed to keep rather ostentatiously away from them, walking apart with Lord Tankney: however, she appeared to be saying *Thankee* quite graciously. Miss Eleanor Warbattle followed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and the two Clarckes followed her—Fanny and Louisa each with an admirer. Louisa was casting languishing eyes, and a smile played upon her parted lips. I saw Mrs Stewart tuck up her dress, trip lightly over some graves, and make room for herself at the other side of Louisa's young gentleman. He was evidently no new acquaintance. Mrs Stewart shook hands with him in the most cordial manner, and monopolised him for quite five minutes, to Louisa Clarcke's undisguised annoyance.

"My dear Mrs Sherbrook," said Mrs Stewart, when at last she stepped into the carriage, "I just stayed behind to ask Mary Sherbrook the name of that second hymn."

She evidently expected a Ritualistic hymnal transition from Aunt Jane; but my aunt was not to be so easily put off.

"Catherine, Catherine," she said, "who is the young gentleman you were talking to?"

When Aunt Jane heard and realised he was young Mr Tankney she was scandalised, and she was also offended; "for I thought, Catherine, you always told me everything, but you never told me you knew Mr Tankney." And Aunt Jane wondered more about this

acquaintance with Mr Tankney than she did about the pew.

During that afternoon a special messenger rode over from the Abbey with a letter for Uncle Sherbrook. My uncle gave me the letter to read, much to Aunt Jane's jealous disgust. Rigardy-Wrenstone informed Uncle Sherbrook that there had been a redistribution of seats in Harefield Church during the last fortnight, and that Uncle Sherbrook, being no longer a churchwarden, had no power to alter the new arrangement.

The first thing on Monday morning, my uncle sent a man and horse into Votlingham for Mr Buggle.

When my uncle's mother had restored Harefield Church, she had given £400 more than she had promised to give, on condition that half the gallery should be appropriated for ever as sittings to Sherbrook Hall, no matter who lived there. I cannot say whether it was illegal to make such a condition, or whether there was no document to prove the contract, or whether there was a flaw in the document which was supposed to prove it. I have never discussed the matter with Mr Jones. I only know that Mr Buggle, "having taken the first opinion in London," finally informed my uncle that the churchwardens of Harefield Church had done nothing actually illegal: the learned counsel in town did not advise my uncle to file a bill against them.

It was a great shock to Uncle Sherbrook to find a lawsuit might put him legally in the wrong, when he felt so strongly he was morally in the right. It was

a shock I do not think he ever quite recovered. He was not well at the time.

In the exercise of his office as churchwarden, Rigardy-Wrenstone had not forgotten to redistribute his own square pew to himself.

The sight of Lord Tankney, her ladyship, the young man gentlemen, and all their gay friends, seated in that hereditary square pew, which the village seemed to believe had been given to Squire Sherbrook by the Apostles, did not disturb the devotions of Harefield for more than two successive Sundays. After that, we were told the Tankneys sent their servants to worship in their stead, Lady Tankney's own maid permanently occupying Aunt Jane's particular corner.

As to Rigardy-Wrenstone, he was so elated by his own cleverness, that I saw him one day, with his hat cocked crooked, walking through the village solely by means of his shirt-cuffs. "Off to Manyfields to-morrow!" cried he. "Georgina, two Clarckes, and myself! Fred Tankney meets us on the road! Quite large party! House full! No end of a bore!"

Shortly afterwards Uncle Sherbrook met Sir John Moultrie in Votlingham, and Sir John told him Lady Offaway was giving out all over the county, that if people wanted invitations to Manyfields they must be civil to young Mr Tankney, her ladyship and the young gentleman having struck up a friendship in the hunting-field. It was said, reported Sir John, that Lady Offaway, being "hard up," rode Mr Fred Tankney's horses.

CHAPTER XI.

Uncle Sherbrook was a gentleman. The idea of meeting my cousin on his own ground, or of teasing him with a set of pettifogging little worries, never entered his head. On the contrary, when his nephew's straying bull made a gap in his hedge and knocked down three feet of a wall, Uncle Sherbrook repaired the breach at his own expense. Had he been good friends with Denis, he would have let him pay for the damage done.

I was sorry Rigardy-Wrenstone amused his petty vanity by constantly worrying Uncle Sherbrook, because, when much teased, my uncle would no longer get angry, but would look worn and enfeebled. At such times, if I went and sat beside him, he would, in his own grave way, be very kind to me, as if subdued into a sort of gentleness. The last few months my feeling towards Uncle Sherbrook had become quite a tenderness tinged with pity, for I had noticed signs of failing health in the old man: there were days when I was touched to see the feebleness which had been strength. I could not help perceiving Uncle Sher-

brook was drawing near to that time when we like to feel some one full of life is standing by us as a friend —some one with sight clear enough to see if servants bully or impatient will-waiters annoy. I felt my uncle liked to have me near him, and that no stranger would be quite to him what I was. It would have seemed strange to most people had I told them this feeling was the one joy of my life. It was this which made me continue to live on at Sherbrook Hall, for I had never thought I could have lived nearly three long years in that place, where life was stagnation, with an avenue-gate at each end, and a narrow prison between.

The close companionship with Aunt Jane's mind was still, as at first, a daily mental pain to me, lengthening the minutes into hours, the hours into days, and making the days endless; for habit never could accustom me to this terrible weariness.

As a relief from the fatiguing despair of Aunt Jane's flowing talk, I had often tried, but as yet in vain, to find something to interest me in Mrs Stewart's conversation. The admirable Catherine had a cut-and-dried sort of mind. Even her charities were a hard profession—a kind of civil-engineering, by which she bored tunnels into comfortable houses where there were good cooks, or opened up a way for herself towards great people. Her charity was a worldly calculation, and was not the outcome of sympathy or kindness. She had no sympathy in her composition, no imagination. I used to hope she might tell me something original

about those blacks for whom she was so constantly collecting; but I found such stories as she had to tell were all of a pattern, taken from one particular style of tract—it was invariably the edifying life and pious death of Sambo. I was dead sick of that sort of Sambo! I had tired of him in early youth. My imagination would have liked to hear of quite another kind of nigger—of the one who eats his father, and if his mother is fat, eats her too. For I had fancied there were still a few savages in Africa. Mrs Stewart's blacks never ate each other: if by accident they ate a missionary, they were converted internally while digesting him.

When I came to be much with Mrs Stewart, I perceived, to my surprise, that it was not the many coloured saints she collected for, but the shining lights of this world she collected from, who inspired her with interest. I remarked, when she mentioned her blacks, Turks, Egyptians, postmen, dogs, or infidels, she never forgot to tell you the name of any distinguished subscriber to the societies for whom she was acting secretary: the higher their social position, the more intimate Mrs Stewart declared herself to be with her fellow-labourers in the Lord's vineyard. She stopped to tell you all about their private affairs, and what Christian-minded people they were, and how many thousands a-year they had, and who they all married and did not marry. I found Mrs Stewart could be a far livelier and more original story-teller when she intermarried and broke the hearts of great and good people, or of great and

good people's near relations, than when she turned up her eyes, and sighed, and yawned, and told, in the words of a tract, how Sambo lived and died. Then Sambo was not related to the peerage: he was only good because he was black.

I observed with amazement that, to a lady like the admirable Catherine, piety, however sound, is not perfectly beautiful unless highly connected. This astonished me! But what astonished me still more was to find that "really nice people's" connections could be "unsound," and yet be neither publicans nor sinners. Every Sunday Mr David Scott yawned and fidgeted during the Rev. Mr Thunderbore's sermon: the golden vessels of the Tabernacle irritated him beyond polite endurance. But to Mrs Stewart he was Lady Arabella's nephew, that dear creature's adopted son, so his yawns did not send him ~~below~~ Hell: had the two Clinch-fisted babies died, I verily believe they might have taken him to heaven. I thought this rather strange doctrine to be held by the best and soundest of women.

The interest Mrs Stewart took in all Lady Arabella's affairs was truly wonderful, and it extended to Mr David Scott.

On Sunday afternoon Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would rest in an easy-chair, and, with her hands crossed over the open Commentary, would break David Scott's heart, and marry Louisa Clarcke straight off to Mr Tankney. The admirable Catherine broke people's hearts in the most cheerful manner possible—quite

in her liveliest "happy release" style! "I took the mule over to Klipton last Friday," she exclaimed; "there was service in the church, and Lady Arabella had said she would be there. Lady Arabella told me everything! The Rigardy-Wrenstones are set upon catching Fred Tankney, and so is Louisa. They have been constantly dining at the Abbey, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has actually called upon Lady Tankney, though nobody goes to Tank Court."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's black eyes sparkled with pleasure. I believe the delight lay in Lady Arabella's having told her "everything"! It seemed to be agreeably exciting to be "told everything" by Lady Arabella! As to poor Mr Scott's disappointment, Mrs Stewart never cast a thought upon it. It is sympathy which divines the unhappiness of others, and sympathy is only the imagination of the heart. Mrs Stewart having no imagination whatever, could not have sympathy.

Had the admirable Catherine spoken kindly of David Scott's disappointment, I should have nodded my head at her as I did at Aunt Jane, and have said "Indeed!" without listening. But her hardness surprised me into interest. It startled me, and set me thinking. I began to think very much about Mr Scott. I often thought of him, and I pictured to myself what a clever, eager man would feel if balked in life—if his career, fortune, future, were suddenly taken from him, when perhaps it had never even struck him they were not his own. To think you are a rising man, and then

to discover you have already fallen; to have the world before you to-day, and nothing to-morrow but ruin without a future—poverty, which is a narrow prison to men brought up like David Scott,—what cruel, cruel disappointment, thought I—what a blight to fall upon an eager life! I felt myself that prison-life was hard to bear, though I had never been beyond the prison-gates; so I could conceive what it would be to leave a large, free world for some small, narrow life, just when ambition, like an eye first opened to sight, saw clearly a great future lying before it.

With all these imaginations in my mind, it grieved me to look at David Scott. I looked at him every Sunday during the sermon. I thought his was the face of a man ruined in love and life. I pitied him, and considered Louisa strangely unkind to have no pity for a ruined man. Had I been an agreeable, attractive creature, who felt she could please and amuse, I think I should have summoned courage to try and enliven Mr Scott, and to share his acquaintance with Mrs Stewart. But I thought it kinder to sit apart and wait for the carriage alone by the churchyard-gate. No one but I seemed to notice poor David Scott's great unhappiness. Mrs Stewart was so cheerful and talkative herself, that I have heard her declare Lady Arabella's nephew had wonderful spirits.

My imagination, once interested in the poor man's sad troubles, took to weaving romances about him. In youth imagination is half our soul. I could not bear to think David Scott was always to be unhappy. I

would think Louisa might some day feel a great wish to comfort him, and then perhaps inherit a fortune and marry him, and with her money make a career for him in life. I imagined what the two would say, and how he would plead to her, and what all their feelings might be: their joy filled me with joy. I would question Mrs Stewart a great deal about Mr Scott and Louisa, and then my fancy would embroider on all she told me. It was thus, by accident, almost without my perceiving it, that I did at length find interest in her conversation.

For several Sundays I had in this manner questioned Mrs Stewart across her volume of the Commentary, while Aunt Jane was dozing over hers. But one Sabbath, when I was falling, as usual, upon the same topic, the admirable Catherine sat up in her chair with a jerk which sent Dr MacShaw to the ground. She fixed her penetrating eyes upon me. "Indeed, Miss Sophy," cried she, "you seem to take a surprising interest in David Scott and his love affairs. Never till now have I seen you take so much interest in any one!"

There was something in this speech, I knew not what, which made me blush, and offended me. I thought the best of women's rasping voice rasped more disagreeably than I had ever heard it rasp before. I feared it might awaken Aunt Jane and set her wondering. But my aunt was fast asleep, for she had really read a page of the Commentary before she closed her eyes. I never again mentioned Mr Scott or

Louisa Clarcke to Mrs Stewart. Whenever she tried to broach the subject, I talked of the blacks.

There was a week when the admirable Catherine only came three times to luncheon and dinner. I forget whether it was the second or third week in February. I have a bad memory for dates, or I should certainly recollect this one, because the singularity of the circumstance was quite an event to Aunt Jane, and made her wonder until I grew bothered from saying "Indeed!"

There was really nothing marvellous in the matter. It would undoubtedly have been wonderful had the admirable Catherine lunched and dined at home four days in the week; but she did nothing of the sort—she only lunched and dined at the Abbey instead of lunching and dining at the Hall. I had long perceived her great anxiety to be intimate with the Rigardy-Wrenstones, so I was not surprised to hear she had undertaken to find Jumping Georgy a first-rate cook.

Mrs Stewart was clever in getting cooks for other people: her particularity as to the soundness of the doctrine put into her own gravy was the sole reason she could never get one for herself. But Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone did not care if Popery or Dissent were served up in the sauce, so long as the cook mixed no grease with her "views." Such a contrast to Aunt Jane, who thought so much of her cook's views and so little of her cook's grease!

Mrs Stewart proved most successful in finding a

cook quickly for Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. She just lunched and dined four times at the Abbey, and talked over the numerous applicants she had seen in Votlingham, and discussed the answers she had received to her advertisements. So good-natured a creature was the excellent, indefatigable Catherine, that we met her driving towards the Abbey with a fat person seated beside her in the mule-carriage. She afterwards told us she had driven to Votlingham herself to fetch the cook in a hurry. Her quick sight perceived that all this anxiety to please Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone made Aunt Jane a little jealous, so she said, "My dear Mrs Sherbrook, how I wish you wanted a cook! I would drive up to London and bring her down all the way in the mule-carriage. But you have your own excellent Emma!—the best of servants!—whose views exactly suit your own! As to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, you would be shocked by her; for I deeply regret to say she does not care what doctrine her cook holds. *You* are very different, my dear Mrs Sherbrook—very different indeed! It would take me a month to get *you* a cook: any sort of religion would not do for you!"

This was intended to be a compliment, and it was taken as such. Aunt Jane was mollified: the pleasant flattery put her into the best of humours. How spiritually refreshing it is to feel that a laxity of views tolerated at the Abbey would never suit the superior piety of one's own household arrangements!

Whenever my aunt was in good spirits, she would

remember she wanted to buy a reel of cotton at Smith's shop, and would remark that Smith had pretty things in his window, and that she had once bought a very nice dressing-gown there—a red flannel one with black spots. She made these remarks while walking on the front avenue, and remembered the reel at the lodge-gate.

While she was buying the cotton, and perhaps improving the occasion to Smith's girls, Mrs Stewart and I waited for her in the street. Mrs Stewart hoped Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone would drive past. The good lady was so spiritually elated by the great service she had been enabled to render Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, that she could not help boasting of it even to me. "Poor dear Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone!" she exclaimed, "what a state she was in! Arriving from Scotland on Monday! The Offaways would not let them leave before! The Clarckes invited for Saturday! The Offaways coming to Tank Court, and asked to dine at the Abbey on Saturday, and no cook in the house! I heard of a woman I thought would suit, so I drove over to Votlingham and brought the cook back in the mule-carriage. She was just in time. I helped her myself with the jellies, and I never saw a dinner better dressed. Lady Offaway is a charming person —simply charming! and Mr Tankney made himself most agreeable, and paid the greatest attention to Louisa Clarcke. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was enchanted, for she is set on the match. She declared she never could forget my kindness; but really I told

her I was only too delighted to be of use to her, and that trouble was no trouble if taken for her."

"Very polite of you, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart!" I said—"very polite indeed! But why is it," I asked, looking into her expressive eyes—"why is it you are so anxious to be of use to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and to be intimate with her, when you are always telling Aunt Jane she is rude and queer, and, even worse, unsound?"

I expected a reply in the charity and high-piety style. Mrs Stewart surprised me by saying, without the slightest hesitation—"Sophy, I know what the world is, and you do not. It is wise, when you have the opportunity, to make intimate friends for yourself in the county where you intend to live. The opportunity must be seized when it comes to hand, for it is not always to be caught by feeling for it. In future life, I think it will be desirable for me to be on good terms with the best county people. I act accordingly."

"In future life!" I repeated—"in future life!" That expression caught my ear. "Mrs Stewart," said I, "when people talk of future life, I have observed their mind's eye is looking over some old friend's grave, as yet undug: their thoughts dig the grave and span it. Uncle Sherbrook is growing old, and you have seen the change in him. I know you have seen it,—you see everything! Mrs Stewart," I asked, "when he is dead, do you expect it will be too dull for you to lunch and dine at Sherbrook with Aunt Jane? or what do you expect or mean? You cannot

mean, Mrs Stewart, that in future life you will keep a cook at Riverbank?"

"Where else should I keep my cook or live?" cried Catherine Stewart, eyeing me as if she imagined there was a secret in my mind she could not read. But there was no after-thought in what I had said. I had no secret, and I think she was satisfied I had none.

Aunt Jane appeared, and put an end to further conversation.

Mrs Stewart had surprised me. It was not her long sight stretching over graves into future years which astonished me. This vista seemed quite natural to eyes like hers. What amazed me was her honesty. Doubtless she had told me the truth, because she knew by instinct I would only believe the truth; and she wanted me to believe and not to despise her, but rather to respect her clever penetration. She was right. I thought better of her for having the courage to avow the worldly policy by which I knew she was actuated; and I was sure she knew I would think the better and not the worse of her. When she cares to know your thoughts, her instinct divines them like genius.

If you live with really dull people, it is strange how you will admire a flash of any sort of talent. I almost admired Mrs Stewart—she was so clever. I also feared a little the woman who could read my thoughts; for my thoughts about her were rarely flattering, and I knew this fact would make her my enemy. It is not very pleasant to feel you have an enemy for

ever lunching, walking, dining, and tatting by your side.

I became interested, and even amused, by observing the untiring consistency with which Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart persevered in making herself useful to Aunt Jane, to Jumping Georgy, and to Lady Arabella Scott. She was like a Prime Minister with a State policy definitely laid down.

The general outline of the policy was clear enough, but I did not trouble my head to unravel all the little ins and outs, for there were details I should have thought irrelevant to the grand design, had I not firmly believed our intriguing saint never laboured in any vineyard without a motive, and that all her motives were links fitting into one chain. Only for this belief, I should have been at a loss to conceive why on earth Mrs Stewart was so very anxious Aunt Jane should invite Lady Arabella to stay at Sherbrook Hall. She actually got the subject on her nerves.

She worked hard, and by some occult act persuaded Snipkins the green-room would be all the better if opened, aired, and inhabited. Snipkins persuaded, it seemed as if there was no one else in the house to persuade. Snipkins permitting, Aunt Jane wrote an invitation to Lady Arabella, and sent it off by the next post.

The day Lady Arabella was to arrive, Mrs Stewart came to luncheon, bringing a small box and a carpet-bag with her in the mule-carriage. She said she had come to help her dear Mrs Sherbrook to entertain

Lady Arabella, but declared no room need be got ready for her—she would just have a bed made up on the couch in Sophy's room. Aunt Jane was so pleased with her dear, excellent, indefatigable Catherine's thoughtful kindness, that I had not even the option of refusing the company of a most unwelcome intruder. It is hardly necessary to add that I slept on the small couch, and Mrs Stewart in my bed.

Aunt Jane was in high spirits. I think she expected to be much edified by Lady Arabella; and no wonder! for Lady Arabella was patroness of many admirable societies, besides being a nominal stall-holder at most fashionable bazaars, and a real one at those sales where worsted-work and pincushions were disposed of for the benefit of the blacks.

My aunt was busy on and off for a day or two turning down the pages of some paper books—the Reports of six different societies, who promoted six different kinds of conversion amongst the coloured races of men. Dear me! thought I, we are to have nothing but blacks, Turks, and piety! I wonder if Lady Arabella will intermarry the blacks; for she must intermarry and relate either blacks or whites.

I was right; but it was exclusively the whites, and not the blacks, for whom her ladyship broke off matches or made them. At first this rather astonished me. Then I remembered Lady Arabella was fond of a little scandal, and I supposed Sambo to be so exemplary in domestic life that his conduct never could give rise to any tale not perfectly edifying.

Aunt Jane started the Missionary Reports several times; but Lady Arabella yawned, and Mrs Stewart twisted my aunt's transitions so that her ladyship could gossip and intermarry to her heart's content. I perceived that at all hours and moments Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was Lady Arabella's indefatigable toady. Only a very active person could have been equal to the task of unceasing flattery which Mrs Stewart set herself. I listened and was amazed. Lady Arabella is singularly open to flattery. She seems to be vain of everything belonging to her: of her voice—particularly of her voice, though she has lost it these many years; of her music; of the make of her frightful caps; and actually of her complexion, for I really believe there are times when she deceives herself into thinking the rouge upon her cheeks is the natural bloom of youth. Her vanity, when satisfied, is of the happy, funny kind. Lady Arabella is a good-natured, good-humoured old lady, of rather limited intellect. She and Aunt Jane cordially liked each other, for their minds were much on a par, only Lady Arabella's was the clearer of the two. She intermarried acquaintances and related friends with a very moderate amount of confusion, and she generally fixed the right story on to the right person, and never made people run away with their own wives.

Now it was after this manner that Aunt Jane intermarried "Edward's" relations and told tales of former acquaintances. Mrs Stewart happened to remark—"Indeed, Lady Arabella, they were quite nice people.

She was a Miss MacLarty-MacLaran, and her mother was a Campbell. Her sister married Lord Frederic Warbattle, who came into the dukedom when the old Duke of Dumbledore died. He was the third brother, but the second was killed out hunting. The MacLarty-MacLarans are very well connected."

"Oh yes, Catherine," Aunt Jane said; "just let me think. Surely I know something about the MacLarty-MacLarans!—something about a very curious wedding; and I think there was an old black cat in the family, which used to appear when any one was going to be unlucky or to die—or was it a witch? No, no; I remember it was a ghost, quite white, and with a bloody hand, because one of the MacLartys had killed a Fraser of Drumloch, and his ghost always had a bloody hand afterwards. Kitty Fraser's father was descended from that very man; and, Catherine, you knew Kitty Fraser long ago—before she married and left Scotland? But, as I was saying, Edward's cousin, one of the Stewarts . . . no! what am I thinking of? it was not one of the Stewarts; it was one of the Gordon girls married a MacLarty-MacLaran, and the ghost came to the wedding-breakfast, though nobody saw him but the bride; and . . . let me think! Dear me! I do believe I am mistaken, after all! for it was a MacNaughten-MacNab she married. It is the two names which puzzled me, and I recollect now perfectly he was not a MacLarty-MacLaran, but a MacNaughten-MacNab, and a very queer-looking man, with a scorbutic face, and sandy hair, and something odd

about the shape of his mouth. Edward is not connected with either the MacLartys or the MacLarans, but he is with the MacNaughtens and MacNabs; and the lady who saw the ghost at her wedding-breakfast was really marrying a MacNab, for I was quite right in what I first said—it is a witch or a black cat which appears to the MacLarans and MacLartys; and it is only the MacNabs and their wives, and now that I come to think of it, not even the MacNaughtens, who see the dreadful ghost with the bloody hand. Sophy, look in Burke's 'Landed Gentry,' and you will find I am quite right, and that she did not marry a MacNab."

"If you do not see it in the 'Landed Gentry,'" said Lady Arabella, "you may perhaps find it in the 'Peerage,' at the end; for I rather think it is through some marriage with a Gordon that the MacNabs are claiming the old Earldom of Whasky. They say the title went in the female line."

My occupation was to verify intermarriages, and to clear up the confusion of distant connections who were somebody else's relations. I had rather hard work.

My big 'Debrett' and I were exiled to a distant window; therefore Lady Arabella could retail her little bits of scandal with that perfect propriety which is so admirable in persons of eminent piety. If for a moment the whispering at the fireplace became audible, I would catch something of this sort—"Ah! but don't you know the ins and outs of that little matter, Mrs Sherbrook? She was engaged to her

second husband while the first was alive. When number one died and they were married, he was so jealous of her that she declared she could not live with him; and so one day, off she ran with the captain, who was twelve years younger than herself, and had not a penny; but all the fortune was in her own power, for the first husband left her everything." Aunt Jane would turn up her eyes and sigh over the wickedness of the world, and Lady Arabella would cry, "Shocking! shocking!" with the good-humoured air of a person who is thoroughly enjoying the pleasures of conversation. "Indeed, Mrs Sherbrook, it is shocking! But it is the fashion nowadays for all the ladies to run away from their husbands. You have heard of that terrible scandal about Lady Gomerry? Everybody is talking of it! one hears of nothing else! And now—could you believe it?—she actually . . ." and Lady Arabella would drop her voice to the low whisper which hallows all a lady says, and, for some strange reason, seems to make scandal no longer scandalous.

Though sanctified by all this whispering, some of Lady Arabella's little tales truly horrified Aunt Jane: she groaned aloud, and wondered what Edward would think if he heard such things!

But Lady Arabella never talked scandal before Uncle Sherbrook. The first night my uncle took her ladyship into dinner, she intermarried the Scotts and Stewarts. The second night, she intermarried a few of his more distant relations and a few of her own;

but finding him rather inattentive, she tried some missionary statistics. The third evening, she began with the Christian negro, went on to the Turkish wife, but soon tired, yawned, and was silent. Lady Arabella considered Uncle Sherbrook such a really good, estimable man! She declared there were few people she respected more than Mr Sherbrook! Yet to respect a man is sometimes to admire him in theory and to be bored and silenced by him in practice.

A little scene I witnessed between them amused me. Aunt Jane had insisted "Edward" should appear at afternoon tea. His presence stayed the flow of Lady Arabella's gossip. Uncle Sherbrook had nothing particular to say. He looked bored and slightly annoyed, for he generally read the 'Votlingham News-letter' in his study from five o'clock till a quarter to six. At length, after two ineffectual attempts to make himself agreeable, my uncle pulled the paper out of his pocket, and gravely proposed to read Lady Arabella the news; whereupon my lady suddenly remembered she had a very important letter to write before post-time, so she went to the writing-table, and my uncle to his study.

Lady Arabella asked me afterwards if I thought she had offended that dear, good Mr Sherbrook? "Really, Sophy"—she too called me Sophy—"really, Sophy, I was afraid to encourage ~~this~~ worthy, serious man to read to me to-day, for fear he might want to read me the Burial Service to-morrow for a treat!"

Lady Arabella was very civil to me; and I discovered, to my great surprise, that I was a subject of

conversation between her and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. On coming rather suddenly into the drawing-room the day after Lady Arabella's arrival, I caught the words, "Mr Jones . . . Sophy . . . I can assure you she has . . . does not know it herself . . .;" and both ladies started on seeing me. Lady Arabella seemed much confused, and Mrs Stewart reddened, but, instantly recovering her self-possession, the admirable Catherine sent me off all over the house on divers messages.

Before Lady Arabella came to Sherbrook Hall, my aunt had planned, as amusements, a visit to the far-distant Moultries, and an expedition to a wet field about six miles off, said to be a Cæsar's camp. But the weather proved showery; and when Lady Arabella's toilette was finished, she preferred gossiping and intermarrying by the fireside. Lady Arabella has a complexion which cannot venture abroad in rainy weather. There are plenty of modern rouges, I am told, which can get wet with impunity; but Lady Arabella's is an old-fashioned complexion, and the rain can wash it quite away. I am not at all sure Lady Arabella does not think modern cosmetics sinful. I know for a fact she considers the yellow hair-dye wicked, and nothing shocks her more than a blackened eyebrow. Her own hair is not dyed: she only wears a false front; and what can be sounder than a false front?—except indeed a wig. Dr MacShaw himself wore a light-brown wig to the day of his death.

One day it poured incessantly, and I was kept very

busy with the 'Peerage' and 'Landed Gentry.' The next day was particularly fine, and Aunt Jane was bent on the expedition to Cæsar's camp. However, she happened to wet one of her boots in a puddle on the back avenue, and Mrs Stewart immediately persuaded her she had caught a serious chill. I told Aunt Jane she was quite well, but Mrs Stewart angrily contradicted me, and Aunt Jane said, "Snipkins says I am looking ill, and now Catherine says I am not well; and, Sophy, when two people both remark you are not well, you must be ill."

So Aunt Jane stayed at home, and Mrs Stewart started for Cæsar's camp with Lady Arabella. On the point of starting, the thoughtful Catherine ran back into the drawing-room, just to tell Aunt Jane it was not improbable she might have to dine and sleep at Riverbank, as she rather expected to find some important papers from the East awaiting her there.

The best of women did find some papers from the East at Riverbank, for Lady Arabella came back in the carriage alone. It was late when she arrived. The dressing-bell was ringing. Her ladyship always took an hour to dress for dinner, so we were surprised to see her open the piano and begin singing. There was not much voice to be heard.

"Charming! charming!" she said; "it would suit my voice to perfection were I not martyrised by this most provoking and unaccountable relaxation of the throat."

Lady Arabella had felt the first touch of cold at

an awkward moment, just when she was taking a high note with Mr Tankney. She had apologised to him, but had promised to be in better voice whenever he came to try over the part with her at Mineham. Such a sudden, unexpected seizure was indeed unfortunate!

"There must be something relaxing in the weather," exclaimed her ladyship; "for I noticed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was in bad voice, even for her,—not that she perceived it herself!"

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone! Mr Tankney! Here was a puzzle; and how Aunt Jane did wonder, to be sure!

It appeared that as Lady Arabella and Mrs Stewart were on their way to Cæsar's camp, and were just passing the gate of Harefield Abbey, Catherine had put her head out of the carriage-window, and had declared there was going to be a heavy shower of rain. "And poor dear Catherine was in a perfect agony about the horses. She said if they got wet they would catch cold, and if they caught cold, Mr Sherbrook would never forgive us. Catherine quite frightened me, so I told her to drive home; but Catherine thought we had better take refuge at the Abbey. And the shower never came, after all! But we found a pleasant party at the Abbey, so in the end I was quite glad we turned back and went there. The Rigardy-Wrenstones were most kind!—most kind! Nothing could have been kinder, and Mr Wrenstone insisted on putting up the horses. The Clarcke girls are staying at the Abbey, and they sang, and Mr Tankney sang. Mr Wrenstone tells me Mr Tankney is certainly to be his father's

heir, and it was Lord Offaway who told him. I had heard the report before, but never on such good authority; and one always prefers to know what a person's position in the county is likely to be, for then it is so much easier to judge whether it is better to know him or to avoid his acquaintance. But now really, Mr Tankney is quite an acquisition! He is a charming tenor! and he has promised to sing at my next concert, for Catherine strongly advises me to get up a concert. Mr Tankney and I might sing one or two duets very well together,—our voices quite suit! Now that I find there is musical talent in Dullshire, I shall not let it lie idle."

Lady Arabella Scott left us the following day.

A hasty line from Mrs Stewart informed Aunt Jane that her excellent Catherine had started off unexpectedly on a short collecting-tour. The change of air was taken to benefit the Cossacks. Mrs Stewart was wise to keep out of the way, as Uncle Sherbrook was much annoyed with her. In his opinion she ought to have driven home when she saw the shower coming, and ought not to have taken his carriage to the Abbey. "Oh but, Edward, the bay mare might have got wet!" said Aunt Jane; "and Denis had the horses put up; and Robert says they were kept quite warm, and given a feed of oats."

This speech of Aunt Jane's made my uncle very uncomfortable. Uncle Sherbrook feels under an obligation to any one who takes care of his horses and treats them well.

Mrs Stewart wrote edifying letters to Aunt Jane during her absence. "Really, Edward," my aunt would exclaim, "what Catherine says about the Cossacks is most interesting and encouraging. And oh, Edward, just listen! Catherine hopes the bay mare is quite well; and she says whenever she sees a light bay she always thinks of the bay mare, and hopes she has not caught cold in this unusually wet weather; for Catherine says such a wet season has not been known for years, and that eight inches of rain fell in the month of February, which she thinks is even a greater rainfall than occurred in the February of the year you were ordained, though that was a most extraordinary year! And look, Edward, Catherine sends you this separate bit of paper, on which she has written the rise and fall of the barometer, and all about the weather, during the whole month of February." My uncle would be forced to say, "Pray thank Mrs Stewart when next you write." He would accept the enclosure from Aunt Jane, and read it biliously yet attentively. Uncle Sherbrook could not pretend to take no interest in the weather.

Mrs Stewart spent a few days at Mineham before her return to Riverbank. She astonished us by coming home in very bad humour with Lady Arabella. They had almost had a quarrel. Lady Arabella was determined the concert she meant to give was to be for the blacks, while Mrs Stewart would have preferred the Christian Cossacks.

At the time I speak of, Russia was waging war in

the East, and many English ladies of rank and fashion looked upon the Cossacks as the enlightened pioneers of Christian morality. I do not know how it chanced to be the fashion that a bloody, aggressive war should be viewed in a pious light; I only know it was the right thing, and the new thing, to collect for the benefit of the Christian Cossack. A hundred guineas and a silk purse could be had as easily for this charity as fifty without the purse for any other. Lady Runaway and the Duchess of Wildfire had written to the papers urging the claims of the Christian Cossack.

The Duchess of Wildfire is well known in certain circles for the munificence of her gifts; but she makes a point of never giving to any Englishman unless he is very, very wicked. If one of her countrymen murders his wife, cuts her up into little pieces, puts her into a blood-stained sack, and sets her floating down the Thames, her Grace collects for his orphans. The Duchess will make greater exertions to save a murderer's life than she would her own husband's. Then, it is true, she is separated from the Duke, and the fault is all on his side.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was very anxious to make the Duchess of Wildfire's acquaintance, and her Grace was delighted to know any one who collected for the Christian Cossack. Lady Arabella's obstinacy about the blacks proved a cruel disappointment to the best of women: she declared Lady Arabella had taken a silly, stubborn fit, and would not listen to reason; she even called her ladyship an intractable mule. Mrs Stewart

was very angry, and certainly Lady Arabella's conduct was provoking; but there are great excuses to be made for her ladyship. She had been, as I might say, brought up on the blacks, educated on the blacks, in the days of Wilberforce. She had dressed dolls for little blackamoors, and had lisped hymns about pious Sambo. Her earliest ideas of right and wrong were taken from stories of black men's good deeds and white men's wicked ones. In youth and middle age she had sung for the blacks, bazaared for the blacks, collected for the blacks, until her acquaintance grew dead sick of her blacks. She was at length persuaded to let her sympathies step up the height of Africa to the Egyptians, and then cross over the water to the Turks. Lady Arabella really grew fond of the Turks when she got a pasha with a red fez to come to her parties. However, Moustapha-Koustapha Bey did not stay long in London, so Lady Arabella went back to the ophthalmic Egyptians. She never could be prevailed upon to try a really white race, not even the French infidels. She did not care a straw for white infidels, whether French or English. The nearest approach she ever made to patronising her own compatriots, was when Mrs Stewart persuaded her to give a concert in aid of the Home for Homeless Dogs.

It was now four—no, almost five—years since Lady Arabella had given a concert for the benefit of the blacks. The county must have forgotten the niggers by this time; so she was determined her concert should be for the blacks, and for no one but the blacks!

Mrs Stewart lunched at the Abbey, hoping to make Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone stick up for the Cossacks. She was much annoyed to find Jumping Georgy equally ready to sing for any charity: Jumping Georgy might perhaps have preferred singing in aid of a new harmonium for Harefield Church, but she was not particular. I heard Mrs Stewart tell Aunt Jane, Mr Fred Tankney had said he *did not care a blow* (dreadful expression!)—he did not care a blow what he sang for, or whom he sang for—a nigger would do just as well as a Cossack for him. Aunt Jane was shocked.

Then the Clarckes had also declared they would sing for anybody—yellow, black, or white; and Miss Warbattle had already promised Lady Arabella to play sonatas for Sambo.

I wondered to see Mrs Stewart angry and surprised at the indifference shown by all these distinguished musicians, as I had thought everybody knew the chief object of an amateur concert is that the amateurs may hear themselves, and let others hear them, play and sing.

So it was finally settled the concert should be for the blacks, and should take place in the morning, on the 19th April. The musicians were invited to Mineham for the evening of the 17th. The 18th was to be a practising day, and the party was to break up immediately after the concert.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle had constituted themselves organisers-in-chief.

Mrs Stewart was invited to Mineham as a kind of extra arranger. Lady Arabella thought she would be

very useful in the general arrangement of everything —the jellies included.

I also received an invitation to Mineham. I was asked to share "dear Catherine's" room. On these occasions everybody shared everybody else's room. I should have liked my somebody to be anybody but herself, and I was in the very act of writing to refuse the invitation when an event occurred—the hall-door bell rang, and it was only eleven o'clock in the day!

Heavens! what an event! I slipped out of a side window, expecting something really important and exciting had at last happened to kill the stagnation at Sherbrook Hall. I peeped round the corner of the house, and was painfully disappointed to see Mrs Stewart seated in her mule-carriage! I was so provoked that I turned back, and did not even care to ask why she had come at this unusual hour. But I was not left long in ignorance. Aunt Jane's voice, resounding through the house, called "Snipkins! Elizabeth! Sophy! Harriet! Snipkins! Sophy! Sophy! Edward! oh, Edward, come! for poor Catherine has sprained her ankle!"

Catherine had sprained her ankle! Then it was an event, after all! I ran into the hall. Aunt Jane, Snipkins, Elizabeth, Dan, George, and Thomas were helping Mrs Stewart from her carriage into the porch. Aunt Jane was much excited, but her Catherine was calm, and quite able to tell all about the accident. This was how it happened: Mrs Stewart was driving towards Votlingham, when the mule took it into his

head to turn round and trot homewards. She stopped him, but then she could not make him go on again; he stood sideways across the county road. Mrs Stewart said, "I told Dan to stay where he was, and on no account to get down, for the mule knows he is an idiot, and won't mind him." So Mrs Stewart hopped out of the carriage, took hold of the bit, and pulled the stubborn creature into his right place. All of a sudden the mule swerved; Mrs Stewart slipped, fell on the muddy road, and sprained her ankle.

"My dear Mrs Sherbrook," said the injured Catherine, "I just let the mule have his head, and he came here of his own accord. And now I am here, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, I don't know how I shall ever get away again. Why, my ankle is swelling to the size of the house!"

"Catherine, Catherine, there is nothing like the cold compress!" exclaimed Aunt Jane. "Snipkins," she added, nervously and in a half whisper—"Snipkins, do you think I might tell Elizabeth to tell one of the girls to get the green-room ready?" Snipkins assented, and with a good-humour which gave her mistress visible joy and great relief!

So Catherine took possession of the green-room. Aunt Jane declared the poor dear creature could not be moved for the next three weeks. I therefore tore up the letter I had been writing, and wrote another accepting Lady Arabella's invitation.

The sprained ankle was a real accident, and not a comedy arranged beforehand with the mule. It would

be an injustice to Mrs Stewart to think otherwise. Indeed I must say she was exceedingly sorry she could not go to Mineham, and would certainly have preferred spraining her ankle after the concert had taken place. But the admirable Catherine was like the great generals we read of in history books: she changed one defeat into another victory, made new plans in the twinkling of an eye, and perceived her own advantage lying in the midst of adverse circumstances. This kind of perception is the secret of success, in peace as well as war: when women have it, they prove clever campaigners in any sort of country.

I told Aunt Jane I had written to accept Lady Arabella's invitation. My aunt groaned aloud: "Oh, Sophy, Sophy!" she cried, "and I did not even read your letter! and I do think this constant craving for society and excitement a very bad sign of a young person's character; and I am sure you have plenty of society at home. It is not as if you were shut up all alone, but you have Edward, and Catherine, and me. But, thank God, Lady Arabella never has dancing in her house! So if you went to Mineham as I do, and as Catherine does, not for your own selfish amusement, but as a means, under Providence, for the furtherance of a good work, I should not so much object. But you know very well, Sophy, you will listen to the music, and talk, and laugh, and I daresay laugh a great deal, though you hardly ever laugh at home, and never once will you think that you are assisting at a work of charity! because you never took any in-

terest in the negroes—never! not even when you were a child, for I remember you once said to me you wished the blacks were whipped to death quickly without long prayers; and it was a very dreadful thing to say, and I was so much shocked and pained, Sophy, that I never forgot it. But your poor dear mother encouraged you in everything; for she never took my advice, or I will say you might have been very, very different from what you are!" Aunt Jane was tearful and huffy—in fact, quite an injured woman.

Uncle Sherbrook seriously thought it was too much for the horses to drive to Mineham and back twice in one week; but Mrs Stewart cleverly persuaded him it would do the bay mare no harm if she were taken out cool, and brought in cool, and driven slowly between times.

Mrs Stewart seemed very anxious for me to go to Mineham. Her kindness puzzled me.

I had set my heart on this visit to Mineham. I was delighted to be going there alone; indeed I was ashamed at feeling so glad to think I should be at rest away from Aunt Jane's mind for two whole days. I longed after new ideas of any sort. I thought even new gossip must be better than old, for at least it would make one realise there were more than half-a-dozen little-minded people in the world. And then to leave Sherbrook at all was to open a gate and see beyond the prison-walls.

Before I knew it had spread its wings, my imagination took flight, and arranged interesting scenes be-

tween Mr Scott and Louisa Clarcke, interwoven with complications caused by the jealousy of Mr Tankney. Howard de Vere never imagined a more thrilling tale, for I am ashamed to say I caught myself planning a duel. I tried to curb my fancy, but with ill success: seeing what it took to be a new free land so near, it escaped from me and fled.

CHAPTER XII.

MINEHAM and Sherbrook Hall are square white blocks two storeys high, with eight large windows to the front on each storey. The lower windows open to the ground. Both houses were built in the last century, and I should say by the same architect. Uncle Sherbrook's father added a porch with Corinthian columns to his house, and a semicircular wing with flattened columns about two inches thick, which, I believe, are also in the Corinthian style.

Lady Arabella's father-in-law was a man about town during the days of the Regency, so his architectural tastes were in the fashionable Eastern gimcrack-and-cupola style. When he built a new wing to Mineham, he took care it should be perfectly Chinese inside, and very Turkish outside. It had one large cupola and two small ones. The two small cupolas let in a small amount of rain, but the large one let in a great deal. Lady Arabella's jointure was sadly taxed to keep these domes in order. The Asiatic wing contains a music-room, a billiard and a dining room. These rooms could now be used, as Lady Arabella had

just put the cupolas into repair. She turned the ordinary dining-room in the body of the house into a bedroom, and thus found room enough for all her guests, except the dogs: then the dogs came uninvited, so her ladyship was not to be blamed—she was only to be pitied.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone brought two pugs, Denis a colley, and Mr Tankney a colley. The two collies did not agree: at night they would escape from their masters' bedrooms and fight in the passage, to Lady Arabella's horrified alarm. Our hostess disliked dogs. I am not sure the Rigardy-Wrenstones liked them a bit better than she did. Jumping Georgy looked neither happy nor comfortable with a pug under each arm; and the colley's peculiarities gave my cousin more trouble than amusement. The fact is, the Wrenstones were not dog-fanciers; but what were they to do? Pugs and collies happened to be the "correct thing;" it was unfashionable to go about the world without them, and in really good taste to take them uninvited to a friend's house and let them dry their paws on your hostess's carpets and sofas. At least Lady Offaway always made a point of doing so; she positively went nowhere without two pugs, a large black poodle, and my lord's colley. My lord frequently left her, but the colley never did. The Marchioness of Offaway positively could not exist without her dogs, though she could get on very well without her children. She was said to be quite too more than fond of that utterly original poodle; she loved those

quite too more than awfully ugly black-nosed pugs; and she perfectly adored the dear colley—now positively she did!

It was therefore natural that, after a visit to Manyfields, the Rigardy-Wrenstones should discover they could go nowhere without two pugs and a colley.

Louisa Clarcke made the same sort of discovery at the same time. No matter where she went, she walked, and drove, and ate, and flirted, and even sang, with a sort of small black rat under one arm. Louisa quite too more than utterly adored it! Snarling Tiney was an awful pet of hers!—so awfully small, and so awfully clever! and it knew so awfully well if you gave it turkey instead of chicken!

Mr Tankney wished Tiney's skin would fit him. By Jove, he would give his best racer to creep under Miss Louisa's arm, and rest for one half-hour upon her heart! Mr Tankney said this with the bow and smile of a foreigner; he looked like an opera-singer disguised as a groom.

Louisa told him he was "chaffing," and said, were he serious, he would begin to "bant" immediately. He replied that if he became thin enough, he never would wait till poor Tiney died,—he would skin him alive or die of jealousy. Louisa gave a little scream, kissed her utterly adorable Tiney, and declaring she quite too more than hated to be chaffed, smilingly encouraged Mr Tankney to continue in this strain of brilliant wit. She chaffed him herself to the full extent of her capacity, and indeed a little beyond it.

I was amazed to hear her; she seemed to have forced her whole nature into some new shape. Her restlessness was perhaps the greatest change I noticed in her. I gazed astounded, just as if I had seen a cold, dead, marble statue suddenly rise up and whistle and dance a hornpipe. I wondered who Louisa had taken as her model of style and fashion. I came to the conclusion it must be Lady Offaway. It was quite too more than evident she tried to copy the language, chaff, and dash of her quite too more than notorious slangy and utterly fast ladyship. I expect the copy was worse and more ludicrous than the original: it always is—three *quite too mores* to every one of her ladyship's.

Fanny and Louisa Clarcke appeared to have unhinged their heads and lost their balance during a short visit to Manyfields: their brains being topsy-turvy, the common-sense dropped out, and was straying quite loose about their heads when I met the girls at Mineham.

Fanny's model of elegance and propriety was Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup. "That dear, delightful Sir Harry Hardup!" said she; "he is quite too more than original with his 'Cre-e-mation, Lady Offaway! but you to-ok that fence in style!' 'Cremation' is a delightful expression!—so utterly original! Cre-e-mation! How I should like to take a five-barred gate, and have Sir Harry at my heels! Cre-e-mation! would not I make him ride after me!"

"Cre-e-mation, Mr Tankney! would not he get an awful spill!" exclaimed Louisa. Mr Tankney laughed

loudly. The girls joined in, and declared if Mr Tankney was so utterly original, they would "split" with laughter. "Now do stop, Mr Tankney!" cried Louisa; "you are positively too funny!"

"Quite too more than ridiculous!" cried Fanny.

"But I say, Miss Clarcke," said Mr Tankney,—"I say, the ladies never get spilt, do they? Cremation! Never!" Fanny reddened.

"Mr Tankney! Mr Tankney!" cried Louisa, who did not even by chance address herself to any one else—"Mr Tankney, I once heard of a strapping grey, *ex-actly* sixteen hands high, who kicked out behind and sent some one in pink flying over her head, and some one did not wear a habit! There was a muddy ditch, and the consequences were quite too more than awful!—and the whole field looking on! Nobody laughed! no one!"

"By George, Fred!" exclaimed Rigardy-Wrenstone, "that was a cropper! The grey is a knowing one at that little game!"

My cousin was sauntering through the Chinese billiard-room at Mineham, apparently in search of his shirt-cuffs. He stopped and joined the ladies in "chaffing" Fred Tankney. There was a general interchange of "chaff," highly amusing to the "chaffers," but mostly incomprehensible to me. The two girls and Mr Tankney were more especially unintelligible: they seemed to have quite a fund of jokes in common which they understood without explanation. They "split" if Mr Tankney said, "Miss Louisa, how about

the cigar?"—and replied in one breath, "Have a brandy-and-soda, and cannon your partner's ball." Whereupon Mr Tankney laughed heartily. "I say, Miss Louisa, I had a run with the Pytchley last month."

"Ex-actly! And pray, Mr Tankney, how was the lady in the blue habit? Perfect figure on a horse! Quite too more than a skeleton! quite too more!"

"I say, Miss Louisa, by Jove, that's too bad!"

"Ex-actly!" said Louisa again. Great merriment.

"It is a stiff country, Mr Tankney."

"Better have a soft fall than a hard one, Miss Louisa: less likely to get a black eye."

"That is quite too more than cruel, Mr Tankney!" Louisa pouts, and Mr Tankney laughs.

"I say, Mr Tankney," cries Fanny, "is it better to get a black eye and keep it, or lose a black boot and ride in a stocking?"

"Cremation, Miss Clarcke! it is only a gentleman's boot, which no one cares to find. A lady's top-boot is sure to turn up and get stuck on a gate, spurs and all, safe enough!"

Both girls considered this remark quite too more than utterly odious, and declared Mr Tankney was an utterly unkind man to remember everything. Mr Tankney gallantly replied that he never forgot a well-shaped boot, or a pretty foot, when it belonged to a lady.

"I say, Fred," said Denis, catching his shirt-cuff and looking down at his own tight boot—"I say,

Fred, Lady Offaway has a neat foot—high instep—stylish thing!" For the next five minutes the girls and Mr Tankney chaffed Denis about his admiration for Lady Offaway and Lady Offaway's admiration for him, and about some *tête-à-tête* drive in a brougham, which had given Lord Offaway an "awful" fit of jealousy. Rigardy-Wrenstone appeared to enjoy this refined style of pleasantry, so I imagined the wit to be after the fashion of Manyfields. He retaliated by chaffing Fred about the same lady. Fred depreciated Lady Offaway, to Louisa's evident satisfaction.

"But I say, Fred," remarked Rigardy-Wrenstone—"I say, must allow, beautiful sight to see her ladyship ride across country straight as an arrow—always in the first flight! By George, beautiful sight!"

"It is beautiful," said Louisa, "to see any one ride a strapping grey ex-actly sixteen hands high!" And Fanny exclaimed, "Cre-e-mation! ex-actly sixteen hands high! Ex-actly, Mr Tankney—ex-actly!" And Rigardy-Wrenstone exclaimed, "I say, Fred, ex-actly sixteen hands high! By George, ex-actly!"

Shouts of laughter, in which Mr Tankney joined. This was the joke of jokes, and the wittiest part of the joke lay in accentuating the word *ex-actly*. Indeed, if any one of the party said "ex-actly," and nothing more, the others laughed. There seemed to be irresistible wit in the word.

We were drinking afternoon tea in the Chinese billiard-room at Mineham: it is next the Chinese music-room, from whence we had been driven, tea-

cup in hand, by Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, Miss Warbattle, and Scarlatti. The Abbey party, including Mr Tankney, had arrived about an hour before. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had appeared with a roll of music and a pug-dog under each arm. She and Miss Warbattle had immediately taken possession of the piano. As in honour bound, Lady Arabella feigned delight. "Really you are too good! too good! Losing no time, Miss Warbattle! Quite in earnest, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone! You are in charming voice, Mrs Wrenstone—charming! It is the weather, for I never felt in better voice in my life. My dear Mrs Wrenstone, we really must have some trios this evening after dinner,—now really, we must! *En attendant*, if you are tired, Miss Warbattle, I shall only be too delighted to accompany Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone."

Jumping Georgy said "Thankee!" rather shortly. Miss Warbattle also thanked her ladyship, but did not leave the piano or tire of accompanying Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone.

Poor Lady Arabella hovered about the coveted instrument for some little time, exclaiming that she adored Scarlatti, and considered you never thoroughly enjoyed him unless you played his music yourself. Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone were so completely engrossed by their own performance, that I can quite believe they never heard Lady Arabella's little hints.

My lady soon tired of adoring Scarlatti at a distance from the pianoforte, so shortly disappeared.

The hanging-gardens of Babylon were all the more elaborate that evening, because her ladyship had taken two hours instead of one to dress.

When Lady Arabella left us, we had carried our teacups into the billiard-room. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone practised in a painfully conscientious manner. She thought nothing of repeating a bar fifteen times. You were not surprised to hear her practise on for ever: scales, shakes, and twists soon became a second nature to your ear. But if the great amateur sang a difficult passage once, and did not sing it again, then astonishment took possession of your soul.

The world keeps turning unceasingly, and we none of us remark it; but if the world stood still, all men would raise a cry of wonder.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone ran up a scale and caught the top note. She never came down again! She was silent!

"Cremation!" cried Fanny and Louisa, "Georgina has stopped singing!"

"Cremation!" cried Mr Tankney, "Mrs Wrenstone not singing!"

"By George!" cried my cousin, "Scarlatti smashed up!"

"Ex-actly!" cried the other three.

We all ran into the music-room wondering what could have happened. There we perceived Mr David Scott and another gentleman. They had entered on the top of the high note. I looked at Louisa to see how she would meet Mr Scott. This meeting, thought

I, may be the first chapter in the most complicated part of the romance.

Louisa pretended not to see the man to whom she had once been engaged, and yet she seemed intensely conscious of his presence. There was an excuse for her blindness in the twilight of the room.

Mr Tankney, wearing the air of a smirking foreigner, pressed forward to shake hands with Mr Scott. Mr Scott gave him one finger.

Louisa walked over to the fireplace and stood alone, apparently gazing up at the Chinese dragons and bells on the pagoda-like chimney-piece—a strange erection, built in narrowing layers till the topmost one reached the ceiling almost in a point.

I saw Mr David Scott glance eagerly round the half-lighted room. He has a speaking face, and a quick, impatient eye,—a singularly expressive countenance; one you will look at and not pass over, if you care to read a man's thoughts in his face. He saw Louisa. He walked hastily across the room, and went up to her, and greeted her warmly with a kind of joyful anxiety, as if he were glad to see her, and hoped eagerly, yet anxiously, that she felt glad to see him. Louisa did not speak. She cast down her eyes, and would not even look at her old lover. Perhaps she feared her heart might melt towards him; for nature had not made her a hard woman, but rather a soft, weak one, easily swayed by others. Mr Tankney watched her closely, and went up to her and spoke to her. She started, and quickly withdrew her hand

from David Scott's, for she seemed to have forgotten it in his.

From the moment Louisa heard Mr Tankney's voice, she became his slave. She was a changed woman. Her noisy excitement returned. Cremation! Mr Tankney chaffed her. Cremation! she chaffed him.

Mr Scott was struck dumb with amazement. He stared in mute astonishment at Louisa, as if she frightened him—as if he did not know her. Perhaps "cremation" was a new word to him, or perhaps he had never before seen the soft die-away in this "chaffing," slangy humour. I must say she was ridiculous: she quite amused me. "Cremation," lisped by her pretty lips, would have set me laughing, had I not seen that her loud and strangely vulgar fastness was a sorrow—nay, more, a tragedy—to the man I had heard once loved her well.

Louisa turned abruptly from Mr Scott, and went off into the billiard-room to have a *tête-à-tête* game with Mr Tankney, just till the dressing-bell rang. Mr Scott made as if he would go too, but Louisa replied to his evident intention by taking Mr Tankney's arm. Mr Fred offered her a cigar.

"Thanks awfully!" said she, and took it. Mr Tankney lighted his cigar, and Louisa proceeded to light hers from his: their foreheads touched.

Mr Scott stood motionless, and gazed after Louisa from the doorway. I think she felt his eye upon her. We do feel the gaze of an eager eye. She

turned and caught his look of scorn. She wavered. Mr Tankney whispered in her ear, and she laughed, gave a puff to the cigar, and stepping forward, offered it with a low courtesy to Mr Scott.

He said nothing, looked at her, and walked away. Never had I seen a man's face speak such strong disgust, and such painful, angry sorrow. I was grieved for him.

"I say, Scott," said Denis, in a whispered aside—"I say, Scott, who is your friend? You forgot to introduce him."

My cousin's question greatly surprised me. When I had arrived at Mineham, Lady Arabella had apologised (quite unnecessarily, I thought) for her nephew's absence, and had told me he had been obliged to go off with Lord Hartmoor, to look at some horse belonging to a farmer who lived at the other side of the county. Lord Hartmoor had come down from town quite unexpectedly, and Lady Arabella said she thought he would most likely dine at Mineham, and return to London by the ten-o'clock train. So I naturally concluded Mr Scott's companion could be no one but Lord Hartmoor.

When I found the stranger and Denis were unknown to each other, I thought I surely must be mistaken, for I had heard Denis speak of "Hartmoor," and mention him in one breath with Furley, Castletower, and Dumbledore. Indeed old Colonel Talbot once told Uncle Sherbrook a story Denis was reported to have enlivened the club with: the tale

was a little comedy, in which Hartmoor, Edinburgh, Wales, and Rigardy-Wrenstone were the chief actors.

Conceive, then, my astonishment when I heard Mr Scott reply, "Why, that's Hartmoor. Surely, Wrenstone, you know Hartmoor? Not know Hartmoor? I could have sworn I had heard you speak of him."

It was on occasions like this one that Denis was truly admirable. His first introduction to Lord Hartmoor must have been a surprise to all present, even to his own wife; yet Rigardy-Wrenstone's ease of manner remained perfectly unabashed.

Lord Hartmoor is a florid, reddish-haired man,—a heavy-weight. He has two ideas in his head—one on the subject of Durhams, and the other on the increasing difficulty there is in getting good mounts for a heavy-weight. He deplored the old times, when he had heard his father say you could pick up just what you wanted for a mere song. He remembered the points of all the horses he had ever bought, and he bought all his horses himself. His lordship declared he would not trust his best friend to buy him a horse. "Or to sell you one either," said Rigardy-Wrenstone. Lord Hartmoor laughed heartily at this remark, and declared it was the very best thing he had heard this long time. Not that I expect a long time had really elapsed since he had enjoyed this identical witticism. I hear it is a standard one amongst sporting men; and then, I am quite sure Lord Hartmoor never in the whole course of his life laughed the first time he heard a joke.

It was not by instinct I knew the worthy Lord Hartmoor had only two ideas in his head. I learnt this fact from hearing the conversation Denis managed to keep up with him during dinner-time.

Rigardy-Wrenstone sat next me at table, but naturally preferred talking to Lord Hartmoor; and greatly to Lady Arabella's relief! She seemed grateful to Denis for talking so much, as she herself had not a word for her cousin: he appeared to bore her intensely. Rigardy-Wrenstone's quickness of perception struck me as being nothing short of miraculous: he really did seem to know by instinct that a good mount for a heavy-weight and well-bred Durhams were the only ideas in Lord Hartmoor's mind which could find words to speak with.

I was glad to have Denis next me at dinner. As he talked across the table to Lord Hartmoor, he had to speak loud, and so covered his neighbour's silence. I therefore did not feel obliged to keep on talking incessantly under difficulties, and Miss Warbattle was a very difficult person to talk to. She sat at my right hand. Fanny Clarcke sat next her; but she was occupied in helping Louisa to entertain that quite too more than original Mr Fred Tankney.

Miss Warbattle ate in silence, and from her look I had thought she would rather not be spoken to; but I had caught an anxious glance from our hostess, and so had taken courage, and had said, "Miss Warbattle . . . this . . . this has been the finest day we have had for a week."

"I beg your pardon?" replied Miss Warbattle, shortly.

"Oh, I only said this was a fine day, Miss Warbattle. It has been rather wet the last week."

"Miss Thursley, I make a point of never remarking the weather." I felt decidedly snubbed, and was dumb.

After a lapse of ten minutes my neighbour suddenly asked me if I admired Schumann. Much surprised to hear her speak, I looked at her to see if really she had spoken, and I thought the Warbattle nose the longest and sternest feature I had ever seen hanging to a woman's face. There is something in a very marked and serious countenance which is apt to lash one into flippancy, so I said, "I beg your pardon, Miss Warbattle?" though I had heard what she had said, as well as she had heard my remark about the weather. Miss Warbattle asked me again if I admired Schumann. Her solemn voice was pitched in a minor key: "Do you admire Schumann?" I replied that I considered some of Schumann's songs "quite too more" than exquisitely beautiful, and some of his compositions also; but I added flippantly, there were a whole set of heavy pieces, generally the ones termed "posthumous" in a concert programme, which Schumann really did seem to have composed in his grave. "They are fearfully learned, and rather heavy," said I.

Miss Warbattle did not speak to me again. Her solemn silence and the Warbattle nose awed me. I

held my tongue, and was thenceforth blind to Lady Arabella's beseeching glances. Really, while Denis was talking for all of us, I did not feel obliged by good manners to make any superhuman efforts at conversation.

Rigardy-Wrenstone continued to entertain Lord Hartmoor until the dessert was on the table. His lordship seemed surprised at his own agreeability. He had to leave early, and departed thanking Lady Arabella for a very pleasant evening. It was a cold, wet night, and Denis had dressed for dinner; yet he insisted on accompanying Hartmoor and Scott to the railway station, though he had to go outside, as the chariot only held two.

"Really, Sophy," said Lady Arabella, "Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone is the most good-natured man I know, and the pleasantest! So kind of him to entertain that dull Hartmoor!" Lady Arabella addressed herself to me, I being the only listener left her.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle had rushed from the dinner-table to the piano, and were just "trying over" once again that "little thing of Scarlatti's." The two Clarckes and Mr Tankney sat sideways on a three-seated back-to-back ottoman. There was no fourth place for Lady Arabella.

"Really," repeated her ladyship, "Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone was a god-send to-night! He kept the table alive, for no one else had a word to say except Mrs Wrenstone's cousins, those two Miss Clarckes; and . . ." Lady Arabella dropped her voice . . . "and

they completely monopolised Mr Tankney — completely monopolised him. He was no earthly use for general conversation—none whatever. And I am so short of gentlemen!" Lady Arabella then complained bitterly of Mr David Scott's unaccountable silence. "And he can talk to any one if he likes to exert himself: so I sent him down on purpose with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and there he sat like a deaf mute; and I shall have Mrs Wrenstone in a huff, and she is my chief soprano. David might at least have tried Schumann with her. She and Miss Warbattle will always talk of Schumann."

"Schumann!" I said. "Oh, Lady Arabella, Schumann is a very serious subject—fearfully and wonderfully serious! I, for one, will never try that subject again with Miss Warbattle."

"It is only her manner, my dear—it is only her manner," exclaimed Lady Arabella. "It is just the Warbattle nose, and the spectacles; but she does not really intend to snub people, and you must not think so, my dear—for now, really, you must talk to Miss Warbattle. I ask it as a favour, for those Miss Clarckes will not be bored speaking to a lady, and the gentlemen don't care for Miss Warbattle. She is not in their style." Lady Arabella put her head on one side and smiled, as if conscious there was at least one lady in the world whom all gentlemen liked to entertain. She repeated, "Not in their style. You cannot make them care for her. But, my dear girl," she continued, "try Scarlatti next time, I implore

you must Musical geniuses are so easily huffed. One keep them in good-humour." Lady Arabella sighed, made a slight motion upwards of her hands and eyes, and looked despairingly towards the piano. I do not think Lady Arabella altogether enjoyed having such a pair of serious musicians in her house as Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, for they seemed seriously disposed only to accompany each other.

As to Miss Warbattle, she certainly is the most sternly serious woman I have ever met. The musical purpose of life is to her a very serious end pursued in a severely classical spirit. She permits no trifling of any sort, and enjoys, as far as it is in her nature to enjoy, the satisfaction of boring an unappreciative audience with a very long "posthumous." The idea of suiting a programme to an audience would to her be like the notion of changing your religion if you asked a Roman Catholic to dinner. She manages *the* Society of Amateur Musicians, and only permits her amateurs to admire what she considers admirable. Miss Warbattle is said to be under the impression that she and *the* Society virtually lead the musical opinion of the United Kingdom. No wonder, then, if the terrible responsibility of this high position has sobered her. She is said to be a great authority amongst the leading professionals, and is commonly supposed to have injured her eyesight by deciphering the manuscript music of ancient unknown composers. Whatever living musicians think of Miss Warbattle,

there can be no doubt the dead must hold her in high esteem. I myself go so far as to believe that every now and then Schumann composes a good, heavy "posthumous" specially for her, and sends it up to her from below with his kind regards.

When Miss Warbattle got to the piano, she never could leave it. When Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone once began to sing, she could not stop.

Lady Arabella's annoyance was fast growing into irrepressible irritation. She gave a small cough, and sang a few bars with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. I heard her, but no one else seemed to hear her, not even Mr Tankney; and I am sure Lady Arabella expected Mr Tankney at least would pay her some attention. But those two provoking Clarcke girls continued to monopolise him, and he still appeared to be making himself quite too more than utterly original.

Lady Arabella dropped her fan. It was I who picked it up; for, sad to say, I alone saw her drop it.

At length Lady Arabella's patience was exhausted, and up she rose from her chair with an angry rustle of ribbons. Luckily, Mr Tankney saw her, and immediately rose to meet her. "What, Lady Arabella!" he said, "do you expect Lord Hartmoor again? and are you going to run away? How cruel you ladies are to the agreeable men!"

Intentionally or unintentionally, Mr Tankney gave Lady Arabella just what she wanted—a subject she could spend her passing little fit of ill-humour upon.

"Oh indeed, Mr Tankney!" exclaimed her ladyship, "if it had not been for Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone, I should have died of Hartmoor. I quite dreaded him! He is a man I never can drag a conversation from. I call him my cattle-plague! and really, in a *tête-à-tête* he is an infliction. I have often tried him, and given him every chance; but would you believe it, Mr Tankney?"—this was said in a softened tone—"would you believe it? he cannot even pay a compliment! Now really, he cannot!"

Mr Tankney took the hint, and made Lady Arabella a few of the little speeches Lord Hartmoor ever failed to make.

Mr Tankney seemed to be paying her ladyship the most charming compliments, and plenty of them. I went to sit beside the Clarckes, so I did not hear what he said; but I perceived my lady's vanity soon recovered its good spirits. Mr Tankney's manner to Lady Arabella was not noisy, but softly insinuating, as if he were acting lover to the elderly widow of the piece. There was something decidedly theatrical about Mr Tankney, or rather, I should say, operatic, because black hair, dark eyes, and a yellow skin, with the features, thick-set neck, and figure of an Italian peasant, remind one more of the opera than of the theatre.

Mr Tankney minced and mouthed English words like a foreigner. His accent was an attraction to some people. The Clarckes and Wrenstones considered it "so interesting." Louisa pronounced it "quite too more than pretty—so awfully refined and so utterly

original!" Then, at the time I speak of, Miss Louisa's friends fully intended her to marry Lord Tankney's heir, and she herself had no objection to the match.

As for me, I took a violent dislike to Mr Tankney from the first moment I saw him. I thought him the most vulgar man I had ever met, and so impertinently affectionate to ladies. I could not endure him. He was no gentleman.

I marvelled to see Lady Arabella take his compliments with eager delight, for I could not believe she could like a man of such bad style and second-rate manners. She puzzled me. I have since discovered, Lady Arabella makes it a rule in life never to let herself dislike the possessor of a good tenor voice. She considers her own soprano is not heard to advantage in a duet with any other kind of voice.

Mr Tankney's compliments were not merely flowers of speech, embellished by French and Italian words, and made "so interesting" by a foreign accent. He led Lady Arabella to the piano, thereby proving he knew the art of practical flattery. A lady of sixty has real pleasure in singing with a young man of twenty-three.

I heard Mr Tankney say, "Our voices, Lady Arabella, were created for each other."

"Quite true, Mr Tankney—quite true; for I always will uphold that a baritone or a bass is a bad match for a high soprano—*un parti bourgeois,* as the French would say."

"And surely, Lady Arabella, the French would add that between a soprano and a tenor *il y a un mariage*

d'inclination." Mr Tankney bowed low, and with his hand upon his heart, he said, "*Et d'une inclination très-inclinée!*"

"Dear me, Mr Tankney," said her ladyship, "you do so remind me of my poor dear *marquis turc*—a charming man; and he spoke French like a Frenchman. Everything sounds nice in French. Delightful language! It is *si bien tourné*, that you can go to the French play and hear all sorts of queer things, and not be a bit shocked; but it would not do at all in English—so coarse and vulgar, you know. If it were not for the French genders, I should never speak a word of English."

The delightful fact that everything which is so queer in English—so coarse and vulgar, you know—becomes perfectly *bien tourné* in French, is a favourite subject with Lady Arabella, and apparently an inexhaustible one. Her ladyship leant against the piano and talked volubly.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone said, "Hush!" Miss Warbattle said, "Hush!"—a severe, decided "Hush!" Yet Lady Arabella did not hear them. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone put up her eye-glass; Miss Warbattle peered through her spectacles over the top of her music-book. The great musicians saw Lady Arabella, and hesitated to silence their hostess. Their perplexity amused me. They whispered together. Jumping Georgy drew herself up and stepped away from the piano; Miss Warbattle stopped playing.

"Charming!" exclaimed Lady Arabella, the instant

the music ceased—"charming! Such an exquisite little thing of Scarlatti's."

"We have latterly been singing Schumann's music," said Miss Warbattle, sternly.

"Swéetly pretty!—sweetly pretty!" cried Lady Arabella; "suits your voice to perfection, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone; and as to the accompaniment, Miss Warbattle, *il n'y a pas à redire!* Now really, Mr Tankney, we must try our duet."

Mr Tankney, gesticulating like a lover at the opera, sang, "*T'amo, t'amo con furor, bell' angiol d' amor,*" in a fine, thrilling tenor voice. Lady Arabella screamed, in reply, "*Traditor! traditor! il cuor mi trema. Crudel! mi trema il cu-or, il cu-or-or!*"

The trembling of Lady Arabella's *cu-or-or* was interrupted by a sharp howl. The instant Lady Arabella began to sing, Tiney began to whine. Her voice affected his nerves. The whine rose with Lady Arabella's *cu-or-or*, and turned into a howl as her ladyship's voice reached the top of the scale.

Ever since dinner, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's two pugs had been sleeping quietly under the piano. Tiney's howl disturbed their rest. They came out to see what was the matter. Louisa chastised and kissed, and kissed and chastised, her utterly adorable but quite too more than awfully impertinent little black sweetikin of a naughty-aughty doggy-woggy.

Lady Arabella recommenced her duet with Mr Tankney. While he sang, the utterly adorable black rat was quiet; but the instant Lady Arabella opened

her mouth, Tiney opened his. Perhaps it was the sad contrast between the rich young voice and the poor old worn-out squeak which set the dog howling. Tiney escaped from Louisa's hand, jumped on a chair, sat up all by himself, and howled as if in pain—as if imploring Lady Arabella to stop. The two pugs suddenly joined their voices to his; and such a barking and howling I never did hear! At this moment Perkins brought in the tea-tray, and my cousin's colley came bounding in through the open door. He was received with a cry of horror from the unhappy lady of the house. "My old china!" she cried—"my china! my china!" The colley enjoyed the general excitement, and barked from pure delight. Before he could be caught, he had raced round the room after the two pugs, and had taken a flying leap over the tea-table. He fortunately only broke one cup and a saucer, and every one except Lady Arabella declared the high jump was a beautiful sight. At length the butler collared the dog, and the colley was dragged from the room. Lady Arabella begged the other dogs might follow him, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone actually permitted Perkins to take away the two pugs. I gave her great credit for doing so. I thought she was highly to be commended; for it was well known in the county that Lady Offaway never tolerated any such insult to her pets. She had, as a fact, dropped the Pastleys' acquaintance merely because Mrs Pastley had objected to having my lord's colley and my lady's poodle in her drawing-room at the same time as my lady's two pugs.

Lady Arabella remarked there was something in Mr Tankney's voice which affected the dogs. "Some animals have very sensitive nerves. *C'est unique!*"

Louisa would not consent to a separation between herself and that quite too more than original Tiney-iney. Positively she could not bear Tiney out of her sight!—now positively she could not! With Mr Tankney's help (she could not do it without) she tied up Tiney's little-ittle muzzle-uzzle in her handkerchief; she tucked the utterly adorable under her arm, and went into the billiard-room.

Fanny proposed to follow her, and asked me to come too. "Louisa," said she, "will be deadly dull—dull as ditchwater! for now that Lady Arabella has kidnapped Mr Tankney, there is no one to chaff. Louisa is an awfully bad listener—awfully! But you look as if you ought to listen well, Sophy, for I don't suppose you have much conversation of your own. How could you? when I hear you positively go nowhere! And if a girl does not go out regularly, she can't have anything to say. She must be awfully slow! for if you never go to balls or parties, you don't know who is paying attention to whom, or what people look like, or what they wear; and that is just exactly what everybody talks about. Whoever talks of anything else?"

I felt the truth of these words, and I knew I must seem very old and dull to girls of my own age. I was sorry for it. The feeling made me shy.

"But come on," said Fanny, "and we will sit to-

gether, for I like talking to any one better than to no one; and we can talk to our heart's content in there, and they will never hear us at the piano."

I followed Fanny. We found Louisa seated sideways on exactly the same sort of back-to-back ottoman she had been sitting upon in the drawing-room. I wondered at her choosing the only uncomfortable, break-neck seat in the room. Moreover, the ottoman was strewn with billiard-balls, and cues were propped up against the raised cushion in the middle. Fanny began removing the balls and cues. I asked why she did not take a chair?

"I prefer the ottoman," said Fanny, in a very decided tone.

"You look uncomfortable, Louisa, turned crooked-ways," I remarked; "here is a chair for you."

"Thanks, awfully!" she answered, "but I would rather stay where I am."

I drew a chair and sat in front of the ottoman, as I did not like the trouble of twisting my neck at every word.

"All very well for you, Sophy, to sit straight up on a chair," said Fanny; "you are so little tied in." Louisa turned round her head and threw a glance over my dress; so did Fanny.

"You do not get your things from Monsieur Soieton, do you?" asked Louisa, with just the slightest little sneer imaginable. It was strange to see a sneer on her pretty doll's face.

I confessed that Monsieur Soieton's name even was unknown to me.

"Never heard of Monsieur Soieton of Paris!" cried Fanny; "quite too more than utterly miraculous! Why, Monsieur Soieton is the only person in the world who knows what really is the fashion. You leave everything to him. He won't let you interfere: but if you are thin enough, he ties you in to perfection; and if you are stout, he will tie you in better than any one else. You have to wait hours for him, and in the end you can't always see him; but he invariably sees *us* himself. He takes an awful amount of trouble, and asks you all sorts of questions. He is so particular about your stays!—so awfully particular about everything, and won't let you wear any petticoats! Now, positively he won't! The Americans are his best customers, for they are awfully rich, and perfect skeletons; and they pay any amount, and tie in beautifully. They always dress in the very height of the fashion, and Louisa was told they never sat down in their best gowns, not even sideways."

"Some people are positively too awkward!" remarked Louisa, stifling a yawn.

"Quite too more than awfully ridiculous!" exclaimed Fanny; "I say, Louisa, like the Pastley girls!"

"They are so awfully slow!" said Louisa, with another yawn.

"Cre-e-mation!" replied Fanny; "and what colours they do wear!—quite too more than awful! quite too more!"

Louisa exerted herself sufficiently to say—"With

their bad complexions it is no matter what they wear. They could not look well in anything."

"Ex-actly," said Fanny; "and still, Mary is married and Emily is engaged."

Louisa answered, almost with animation, that she could not imagine what Mr Vernon found to admire in Mary Pastley.

"She has not even good eyes like Emily," said Fanny; "and if she is amiable, it is merely because she is plain."

"Perhaps she is clever," said I.

"Men hate clever women!" cried the two girls in a breath; "they never marry clever women!"

"Sophy, you know nothing of life!" added Fanny; "you are quite too more than ludicrous! quite too more!"

"Thanks, awfully!" said I—"awfully!"

At this moment Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone came in from the next room, stepping very high. Her face wore an expression of annoyance: Lady Arabella and Mr Tankney had begun another duet. In this hour of trial, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone looked as if she found it impossible to sit still. Fanny appealed to her. "We are wondering, Georgina," she said, "what on earth possessed Mr Vernon to marry Mary Pastley."

"Can't tell," replied Jumping Georgy, crossly; "the girl did not know one note from another. She sang out of tune, and she had neither fortune nor title to carry it off." These last words were said with much irritation of manner. The Drill-sergeant turned right-about-left, and pranced back into the music-room.

"Dear me!" thought I, "you have more visible human nature in you than six ordinary women!"

Louisa said any one could see Georgina expected to monopolise Mr Tankney, and declared Georgina was quite too more than ridiculous. "Mr Tankney," she said, "wants to sing with me next. He told me, as soon as ever he had killed off Lady Arabella, he and I were to try our duet."

I asked what duet they would sing?

"Oh!" cried Fanny, "Louisa has only two. It is the one she used to sing with David Scott."

"I do wonder," exclaimed Louisa, "if he will be back by then. I do so hope he won't, for I can see he is awfully jealous!"

There was something in the way she hoped Mr Scott would not come back in time for the duet, which made me think she really hoped he would.

Fanny was of the same opinion. "Nonsense, Louisa!" she said, "you delight in making him jealous. You are dying to tease him; now you know you are!"

Louisa declared Fanny was quite too more than odiously unkind! quite too more!

"Ex-actly!" exclaimed Fanny—"ex-actly!"

Although Louisa again repeated, "Quite too more than odious! quite too more!" she brightened up in the most astonishing manner. Her spirits rose, she became lively, and began talking with Fanny of a ball they had lately been at. They both agreed it was an "awfully dull affair! no men!" and Louisa declared

she hated going out—"awful bore!" Still, she discussed with unmistakable interest the dress and personal appearance of all the ladies and most of the gentlemen at the ball.

Louisa and Fanny were lenient towards ugly men, but very severe upon the plain ladies; they called them "dumpy frights" or "angular guys. Such awful bores, you know! The men won't dance with them, so they turn into a set of gossiping wall-flowers, hear all you say, see all you do—awful nuisance!"

"I detest ugly people," said Fanny.

"I abhor them," said Louisa. "I never do pretend to endure them; and as to a cripple, why, if I see one, I have no appetite for a week! I am just like Lady Offaway, who had a son with a short leg, and never could sit in the room with it. Luckily, it is dead now."

Both girls seemed proud of detesting any sort of fright. They spoke as if to hate ugliness were a sign of high-breeding and fashion. Louisa fanned herself with an air of superior good taste, and still more, of conscious beauty..

The two Clarckes compared notes, and judged the ladies they had met according to their figure, eyes, nose, mouth, and hair. Cre-e-mation! how they pitied the "men," who had to be civil to the old ladies and the plain girls!

"Such a pack of old Dows!" cried Louisa.

"Such a pack of young Dows!" cried Fanny.

Louisa exclaimed—"Poor Mr Tankney! he had to take in Miss Brabazon to supper!"

"She has such a bad complexion and such wretched little eyes!" said Fanny; "awful bore for Mr Tankney!"

Louisa remarked pettishly that Mr Tankney was not to be pitied, "for he could not flatter the old Dows in French and in English as he does, if he had any sort of eye." Fanny disagreed with her sister, but Louisa remained of opinion that Mr Tankney was no great slave to beauty. "Nothing to David Scott!" said she, and only wondered how David Scott ever spoke to a plain woman at all. "How they do bore him!" she said; "it is never he who speaks to them—it is they who speak to him!"

"Ex-actly!" exclaimed Fanny: "all very fine to say pretty girls are awful flirts! the plain girls would be greater ones if anybody would flirt with them!"

"Cre-e-mation!" cried one Miss Clarcke, "only fancy a man flirting with Lucy Hay!"

"Or with Alice Bingham!" cried the other.

"Or with me!" thought I.

I saw Louisa look at me, and for the first time since my mother's death I remembered my commonplace appearance. I had quite forgotten I was a plain woman. Other thoughts and worries had filled my mind of late years. I knew I felt stupid and heavy-souled, but there was nothing at Sherbrook Hall to remind me I was ugly. The crows on the back avenue were accustomed to me; the Sherbrooks and Mrs Stewart knew me by heart—they took me for granted as an accepted fact, and it never entered

their head to remark my looks, or to reason about my face and figure.

The two girls talked on, and often talked together.

"Alice Bingham! regular green eyes!"

"They say she is clever."

"Because she is such a fright!"

"Such a bad figure!"

"Who was she with?"

"The Perceval-Spencers, and she introduced me to the girls."

"And what did you think of them?"

"I did not care for the eldest; she has prominent teeth, and her upper lip is a mere cover-gum, and nothing more: but I did not dislike the younger one; she does not look badly in blue."

"Light blue?"

"Yes, the new shade."

"By the by, was not it their brother who ran away from his wife last week? She was the person we met at the Marshalls', who had the waist and the double chin, and who was so ridiculously fond of him."

"But he only married her for her money."

"Poor fellow!" sighed Louisa; "no wonder he went off with a beauty like Lady Emily Dane, though she *is* the fastest woman in London."

"Whatever Lady Emily may be," replied Fanny, "she certainly is not bad-looking."

"Real violet eyes!" said Louisa.

"Yes," said Fanny; "one hears of a great many

people who are supposed to have violet eyes, and who have not—but she has."

"Lady Emily is an awfully brave woman—awfully!" exclaimed Louisa; "she always wears the most trying colours!"

"Captain Joulter was a great admirer of hers before she married Colonel Dane."

"Poor dear Captain Joulter! He is a regular Apollo! six-feet-four!—and quite too more than original! quite too more!"

"Ex-actly!" cried Fanny; "how he does abhor plain people! but he never calls them ugly. If you show him a complete fright, he says she is a very good-natured girl."

And Louisa exclaimed, "Captain Joulter has a tremendous eye for beauty. He is awfully critical!"

"He does not admire Mary King."

"Or Gertrude Bruce."

"Oh dear, no! I should rather think not. But Captain Joulter says he won't call Gertrude Bruce actually good-natured; he only calls her clever and agreeable."

"Well, I do declare that's too bad!" cried Louisa; "for now really, she ties in well!"

"Yes," said Fanny, "she ties in well. I rather like her."

I perceived to "tie in well" was some atonement for the crime of ugliness; it seemed to be the only one a girl could make.

"Cre-e-mation!" exclaimed both Clarckes, jumping

up. Louisa jumped so quickly that she cracked a string. "Cre-e-mation!" they exclaimed, "here are the men back again! they are both in the music-room."

"What a bore!" added Louisa.

"And here's Mr Tankney," said Fanny; "he is coming to claim your song, Louisa, so David Scott will hear the duet. And you are enchanted—quite too more than delighted! Now you know you are, Louisa—you know you are!"

But Louisa declared it was an awful bore—awful!

When Mr Tankney came up to her, and reminded her in flattering terms of the duet she had promised to sing with him, I heard her tell him that now really she could not sing, for that now really she had no voice to-night—now really she had not; it was awfully weak—awfully: and that she had quite too more than an odious cold—quite too more! Her exclamations provoked a shower of little compliments from Mr Tankney. Louisa yielded visibly but slowly, requiring much small flattery to persuade her. At length she allowed Mr Tankney to lead her into the music-room, but she just got there in time to be too late. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had that moment taken full possession of the piano.

The Drill-sergeant insisted upon having a trio to begin with.

"Mrs Wrenstone is so odd!" croaked Lady Arabella in my ear; "she is dying to make up a match between that very fast young cousin of hers and Mr Tankney; and she must know there is nothing like a duet for

helping on that sort of little arrangement, and yet she will sing herself! She is always bent on singing herself. *Et ce n'est qu'une voix d'art.*" I think these were Lady Arabella's exact words; but I am not quite sure, as I had the greatest difficulty in catching them, owing to her hoarseness. She sipped water, and whispered that the horrid damp weather had quite affected her throat.

When the trio came to an end, Jumping Georgy would sing a solo. After the first solo, she sang a second; and then Miss Warbattle proposed she and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone should just try over that wonderful composition of Brahms with the voice accompaniment. The wonderful composition was no short effort of genius.

Louisa betrayed much annoyance during the first solo, and even remarked that the piano "or something" was out of tune. But when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone began a second song, Louisa perceived the case to be hopeless. She made the best of her trying circumstances. She beckoned to Mr Tankney, and went into the next room. She took care to sit near the folding-doors, in a place from whence she had a good view of Mr Scott, and where he could not fail to see her. She made up for not singing with Mr Tankney by flirting with him. Lady Arabella whispered, "*En attendant*, Sophy, a *tête-à-tête* is no great waste of time."

I could see Louisa eagerly watched the effect upon Mr Tankney of her every smile and gesture. She exclaimed, loud enough for me to hear, "I say, Mr Tank-

ney, how awfully jealous men are! Positively, you can't speak to one man without driving another to the very verge of suicide; now, positively you can't! It is so ridiculous! quite too more than ridiculous!"

As Louisa spoke, I followed her eyes, and saw they fell on David Scott's grieved, indignant face. His countenance is one which expresses strong feeling powerfully. Undoubtedly Louisa had managed to arouse his jealous anger. Such an awful bore for Louisa!—awfully awful! Still, it was a sort of boredom which did not depress, but rather excited her. She in nowise discouraged Mr Tankney's exaggerated attentions. Her lazy blue eyes quite sparkled: the flush upon her cheek became her; and I am sure Mr Tankney told her so. He whispered in her ear, leant over her, and put his arm round the back of her chair in the most free-and-easy manner. He was a vulgar man. I pitied Mr Scott for having so ill-bred a rival, —a man not to be compared to himself, either in manner or appearance—one who was only favoured so highly on account of his "good expectations," as they were called. I thought there must be more bitterness for the heart in feeling our rival is contemptibly our inferior, than if we felt he is worthier or has some greater charm than we. I thought so then; I do not think so now.

Lady Arabella did not like Mr Tankney's manner. She looked annoyed, and whispered that Mr Tankney forgot "he was not at the opera." The words had barely escaped her lips when she corrected herself, and

said, as clearly as she could, "I mean it is Miss Louisa who forgets where she is. Such open flirtation is always the lady's fault—always. But I am very glad David sees her; he will believe his own eyes. Catherine said he would, and . . ." Lady Arabella continued talking, but grew so hoarse I could understand no more. Finally, she had to sip her glass of water in silence till bedtime, or rather until Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone finished their "rendering" of Brahms' wonderful composition. By then it was nearer the time people usually get up than the hour they should go to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

No one came down much before eleven o'clock next morning, except Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle. These indefatigable musicians rose early, and tried over that great sonata of Schumann's, that little thing of Scarlatti's, and that wonderful composition of Brahms. They were very proud of their early rising and musical energy, and were sanguine about the success of the concert. Miss Warbattle hoped to raise the musical taste of Dullshire to the exalted level of the Society of Amateur Musicians; but Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone knew it would take more than one concert to "drum" a taste for really good music into the heads of a set of people who went wild about that Miss Elmer's *solfeggi*. "We ought to give a series of concerts," said she.

Mr David Scott did the honours of the breakfast-table in the absence of his aunt. He was neither in good nor in bad spirits: he seemed slightly irritated by the foreign burr in Mr Tankney's accent, but that was all. I had expected a state of dismal despair or of jealous rage; and there was Mr Scott eating his

breakfast like any ordinary man! He hardly appeared to see that Louisa flirted more than ever with Mr Fred Tankney. I was puzzled.

Rigardy-Wrenstone was what Fanny called "in great form." He kept up a flow of unceasing talk. Hartmoor had said many sensible things to him, and he had made many remarks to Hartmoor, well worthy of repetition. He patronised everybody, and even patronised me. He inquired affectionately for the Sherbrooks, and especially for my uncle; in fact, he spoke as if his nearest neighbour were also his best friend. He told us Hartmoor had inquired for Sherbrook, and had said Sherbrook was a distant cousin of his. Hartmoor had wanted to know if Sherbrook did not live at this side of the county, and had asked why he never came to town now. "I will tell Sherbrook Hartmoor inquired for him," said my cousin.

After breakfast Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone returned to the piano, Louisa played billiards with Mr Tankney, and Fanny took a turn round the stables with Denis and Mr David Scott.

Lady Arabella did not appear till lunch-time, and then she came down as freshly coloured as a rose. Her voice was better. We all inquired for her voice: it was a piece of etiquette at Mineham always to inquire for Lady Arabella's voice. Usually her ladyship gave each inquirer a separate detailed account of the very singular kind of bronchial irritation from which she suffered, never failing to add, "Strange to say, this tiresome affection has no bad effect upon my singing-

voice. My voice is just as strong as ever, except when I am actually suffering from an acute attack. In fact, I really think my voice is richer than it was thirty years ago."

Lady Arabella's remarkable descriptions of the very peculiar state of her bronchial tubes were cut short by the arrival of a special messenger from Manyfields for Mr Tankney. Lady Offaway requested Mr Tankney to ride over that afternoon to Manyfields with half-a-dozen of Lady Arabella's concert-tickets in his pocket. Lady Offaway begged Mr Tankney to tell Lady Arabella she feared that she herself would be unable to attend the concert. The Marchioness kindly promised to send the steward, the housekeeper, three of the upper servants, and Sir Harry Hardup, "so as to fill the rooms."

Lady Offaway and Lady Arabella were only just on speaking terms—nothing more. Lady Offaway had said she "positively could not be bored having an ancient aboriginal like that Lady Arabella Scott at Manyfields; now positively she could not! It would be quite too more than ludicrous!—like asking an antediluvian animal to dinner!" This saying was repeated all over the county, and came to the ears of the "ancient aboriginal" herself. In consequence thereof, Lady Arabella did not approve of Lady Offaway, and was at a loss to understand why some persons imagined Lady Offaway led the fashion in Dullshire. For her part, Lady Arabella had no wish whatever to cultivate Lady Offaway's acquaintance.

The message about the steward, the housekeeper, and the upper servants, was not calculated to give Lady Arabella a sudden inspiration of goodwill towards her neighbour. Her ladyship bristled up, and doubted if she had any tickets to spare. She might perhaps have one for Sir Harry Hardup,—perhaps; she was not quite sure.

But Miss Warbattle, looking much puzzled, thought Lady Arabella had made a mistake, and was certain—perfectly certain—there were twenty-eight seats as yet untaken. Miss Warbattle, being seriously set upon disposing of all the vacant places, eagerly pressed Lady Arabella to lose no time in sending the tickets. "We *must* have an audience," said she. Miss Warbattle was eating her luncheon without her spectacles, and with Schumann on the brain. She understood nothing, she saw nothing, she was blind to the visible struggle in Lady Arabella's mind between pride and empty benches. The conflict was an amusing sight to see.

Finally, the longing to dispose of her tickets, and the wish to propitiate Miss Warbattle, overcame Lady Arabella's other feelings. She found, to her surprise, that she really could let Mr Tankney carry off six of her tickets to Manyfields, only she must beg he would give her the six guineas while she remembered the money—she had such a bad memory! always forgot everything! And Lady Offaway could pay Mr Tankney.

As Mr Tankney rode away, Louisa remarked to me what an awful bore it was Lady Arabella had no horse she could ride. Awfully sorry had not brought her own

pony! Just a nice canter to Manyfields! And now, she supposed she would be expected to drive in a pony-carriage *tête-à-tête* with that David Scott. Quite too more than a nuisance! Hated old castles, and that sort of thing!

Lady Arabella had proposed an expedition to the ruins of Airum Castle: it was only an eight miles' drive, and Rigardy-Wrenstone was particularly anxious to go there, because he found the castle had belonged to one of Hartmoor's maternal ancestors. Hartmoor had told him he must go and see the old ruin. "Bothered me to go! Not much in my line!"

Miss Warbattle did not intend joining the expedition: there were certain movements and passages she must "try over" in the course of the afternoon while she could get the piano to herself. It was taken for granted that if Miss Warbattle remained at home, she did so in order to fulfil a serious musical duty: she could not be expected to entertain Lady Arabella. Now it was agreed that somebody must stay with Lady Arabella. Poor dear Lady Arabella! how could she venture out? There was a damp in the air which might attack her throat.

On our way up-stairs, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone wondered if she ought to stay at home with Lady Arabella. "Maria Warbattle," said she, "can't be expected to amuse Lady Arabella; and I know, if I stay, Maria will want me to sing that thing of Schumann's."

"As for me," said Fanny, "I am an awfully bad hand at entertaining the Dows! awfully bad! always was!"

"Nothing to me!" exclaimed Louisa; "I can't even talk to my own mother: quite a knack! like talking to poor people! I should make an awful mess of it, for I am a shocking listener. I positively can't listen! now positively I can't! But I say, Georgina," she added—"I say, I should rather stay than have David Scott persecuting me all the livelong afternoon. Positively you must protect me! now positively you must! Awful bore!"

I then proposed to remain with Lady Arabella. The three ladies jumped at my offer, and declared that certainly would be the best arrangement. They were sure no one was better suited to "that sort of thing," and perfectly convinced Lady Arabella would rather have "Sophy" than any of them.

There is one rather peculiar advantage in being a plain woman: people are always quite certain you are suited to the duties of life. They feel sure you were specially created to be bored instead of them.

I dreaded the Chinese wing haunted by Miss Warbattle and her Posthumous Schumann, so I went and waited for Lady Arabella in the old drawing-room. When Lady Arabella found me there, she gave a little scream of surprise, though she must have expected to see me; she was, oh, so grieved I had not gone with the others! *Du reste*, as I had remained, we might as well make ourselves comfortable, and stay where we were, and leave the wing entirely to Miss Warbattle.

"There is an echo in that Chinese wing," said Lady Arabella; "it carries the notes, and keeps them going

in your head when they have stopped. Miss Warbattle seems to have been playing all night long and all day long. But I have shut the double doors," she added, "so we can hear our own voices. Draw in your chair to the fire, my dear; we have just time for a nice little chat. It is barely three o'clock, and they will not be back till six."

Three hours! an endless time, thought I. But Lady Arabella seemed so glad to have caught a listener, that I prepared to intermarry and say "Indeed" with a cheerful countenance. I looked round the room for 'Burke' and 'Debrett,' as I expected we should plunge into instantaneous intermarriage; but just at first, Lady Arabella had other little matters on her mind.

"Oh, my dear," she began by exclaiming, "fast girls — fast girls! what an extraordinary invention they are! the most vulgar invention of modern days! Now would you believe it? Miss Louisa took possession of the pony-carriage, and declared David really must drive her; but David, *Dieu merci*, was not to be caught! he insisted on giving the reins to Mr Wrenstone, jumped into your cousin's waggonette, and drove off leaving the pony-carriage to follow. I really am thankful, thankful beyond measure, to see David so perfectly cured of his infatuation for that girl."

"Infatuation!" I repeated, — "infatuation, Lady Arabella? He was, then, much in love with her? I pity him. Tell me about him. It is hard to be disappointed in everything—hard to be cheated of every hope in life." I knew what it was to live without hope.

"Disappointed!" said Lady Arabella sharply, and she fumbled for her heavy gold spectacles as if she wanted to take a good look at me—"disappointed! Nonsense, Sophy—nonsense! Who could have put such an idea into your head? David never cared for that Miss Clarcke—never! She was not the right person for David. No style about her whatever! Besides, when David marries, there really must be a little money lying somewhere between him and his wife. Not that I should ever recommend David to marry for money," she exclaimed, warmly; "indeed David would never marry for anything but love. David is romance itself! Not that he is so very particular about great beauty, but only most romantic, in his own way. The most romantic of men, and the very last one in the world to marry for money—the very last!"

For the next ten minutes the affectionate aunt praised her nephew. David was so clever—he might have taken any degree he liked at college; he never smoked; he never gambled; he was the most affectionate, domestic, and disinterested of men. He would be the best of husbands, but he never cared for that Miss Louisa Clarcke—never! never! "And he knows it now! and he sees she broke off the engagement of her own accord. Catherine said he would. Certainly, Catherine Stewart was quite right in advising me to give a concert, and have all the Abbey people here with Mr Tankney to meet David." And Lady Arabella repeated, "Catherine was quite

right! quite right!" and exclaimed, "Catherine has a perfect knowledge of everybody and everything!" Lady Arabella said the constant companionship I enjoyed with a person like Catherine Stewart was an inestimable advantage — "inestimable, my dear, inestimable! a privilege!"

"A privilege," I answered, "only to be rightly appreciated by those on whom it is daily conferred."

"Just so," exclaimed her ladyship; "Catherine is invaluable to us all; she helps one to bring people together, and sees things as they are, and as they will be a few years hence. Catherine was determined I should know Mr Tankney, for she knew he would be invaluable at my concerts; and she says truly that I shall have to know him when his father dies, as he will then be one of the chief county people, with £30,000 a-year, and most likely a title; and Catherine hears Lord Tankney has an incurable complaint, and cannot last much longer. Besides, Catherine says we must not visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, but must remember that vengeance belongs to the Lord."

"Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart," I replied, "quotes Scripture with great effect."

"Catherine," said Lady Arabella, "is an excellent creature—excellent, and can manage everything, and bring everybody together; and Mr Tankney is invaluable to me—simply invaluable! for Lord Studhorsey will not sing with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has offended Mr Reginald Meltem;

so we could not get on without Mr Tankney. And Catherine is quite right in saying, no matter how equivocal a gentleman's position in society may be, if he has only a voice and expectations, he can go anywhere. All he wants is to be introduced by the right person. Now you will see, Sophy, when I have introduced Mr Fred Tankney, he will become the rage. I am aware Lady Offaway has already taken him up; but that I consider a positive disadvantage to him. I can let him down or take him up, and society will do the same!"

Lady Arabella's look of satisfaction as she said these words amused me. She told me that she might ask Mr Tankney to meet any one. "Catherine said so. Catherine said the Rigardy-Wrenstones would be enchanted to meet him! And it is so necessary to keep Mrs Wrenstone in good-humour! and so desirable to have more than one singer at a concert! Miss Louisa will only be too delighted to sing with Mr Tankney, and she won't catch cold at the last moment! and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will not cut Miss Louisa's duet out of the programme. She will keep her temper, and look upon the song as good flirtation instead of bad music. I saw she would even let Miss Fanny sing if I asked Sir Harry Hardup to come and listen to her. My dear, I had the tact to see it!"

Lady Arabella was vain of her social tact. She whispered to me, as a dead secret which I was not to tell Miss Warbattle on any account, that she had sent an invitation to Sir Harry Hardup by Mr Tankney.

She said Miss Warbattle need not know Sir Harry was coming until he had come. "The German flute," remarked Lady Arabella, "will take immensely with the audience, and I know Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will let Sir Harry play *My Lodging is on the Cold Ground*, and even the variations. The Wrenstones would be glad to get Sir Harry's name for Miss Fanny: there were Hardups before the Conquest. It is only Miss Warbattle who will seriously object to the flute, so I must manage to keep her in good-humour if I can. My dear, I have some tact, and I sent those tickets to Lady Offaway solely to please Miss Warbattle. On these occasions I sacrifice every feeling to my amateurs! Now," continued Lady Arabella, sinking her voice as if she were talking treason, "I should like to ask Lord George, but I dare not! Miss Warbattle thinks the Spanish solo dreadful trash, though she is Lord George's own niece. Why, my dear, he is her only uncle living, for he is the last of that generation. The present Duke of Dumbledore is her cousin: he has no son, you know; and as his father married a second time, the heir is a step-brother, and a cousin as well, as the second duchess was the Duke's cousin. . . ." And Lady Arabella stopped to explain by what complication of relationship the late duke managed to be his wife's cousin. Whereupon her ladyship fell hopelessly into intermarriage.

She enlivened the endless subject with little bits of social biography, and improved it, I had almost said

sanctified it, with scandal. Her hushed voice, and the manner in which she deplored the state of modern manners, were truly edifying—more edifying, perhaps, than the tales she told.

Lady Arabella gossiped and intermarried until her guests returned from their drive. At appropriate intervals I exclaimed, "Indeed!" and without yawning: my education was perfect in this respect.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lady Arabella to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Mr Scott—they came first in the pony-carriage—"dear me!" she said, "is it possible you are back again? Sophy has made herself so very agreeable that you seem to have been gone no time! Really, Sophy, you are agreeable! You have quite the French talent for conversation."

Mr David Scott turned to me, and smiling, thanked me for having so well entertained his aunt; but he was sorry I had been shut up in the house all this fine afternoon. He was very kind and polite.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone exclaimed aloud at finding we were sitting in the drawing-room with the double doors shut. "It is a real treat to hear Maria Warbattle play Schumann!" she said, in an angry voice, as if resenting an injury. Without more ado, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone marched off to the Chinese wing.

Lady Arabella prepared to follow her. The Clarckes had arrived, and I saw her ladyship would have liked to stay and keep an attentive eye upon Louisa; but Lady Arabella only dared wait long enough to repeat what she had said before—"Back again so soon! Is

it possible? Sophy has been so very agreeable that it seems no time since you left!"

For very shame her little ladyship then trotted after the Drill-sergeant.

"You must be a good listener, Miss Thursley," said Mr Scott, laughing. I too laughed to see how experience had taught him the true meaning of his aunt's compliment; but before I could answer, Louisa Clarcke was speaking for me.

I had seen Louisa come into the room looking pale, and pouting. She seemed instantly to perceive Mr David Scott was standing beside me, and to see we were laughing together. She grew paler, and then blushed deeply. Her change of countenance was not lost on my companion; an unmistakable gleam of pleasure crossed his face. I saw he watched Louisa, while trying to appear unconscious of her presence.

Lady Arabella's "Sophy has been so very agreeable since you left," was, strange to say, a compliment which seemed to provoke Louisa, and even to irritate Fanny.

"I am sure Sophy talks awfully well to old Dows of all sorts," said Louisa, pettishly, to Mr Scott; "quite in her line! I knew Lady Arabella would find her awfully agreeable."

"Quite too more than awfully!" exclaimed Fanny; "if you like the kind of thing, you are sure to do it well."

Louisa exclaimed—"All a matter of taste!"

"Of good taste!" cried Mr Scott, in a fiery manner: his violence surprised me.

"I don't set up for having good taste in anything, Mr Scott," retorted Louisa, laying marked emphasis on the *Mr Scott*—for since their short engagement, they had fallen into the habit of calling each other by their Christian names. "I do not set up for having good taste in anything," she repeated, "except—except in men! I always choose the best sort of man." Louisa said these words as if she were a little ashamed of them; she bent her head and caressed Tiney. It was in suchlike repartee that Lady Offaway was reputed to excel; but Louisa had only stayed four days at Manyfields.

"Louisa and I," cried Fanny, "go in for the jolliest men, jolliest horses, jolliest places, jolliest fortunes, jolliest diamonds, and all that sort of thing!" Fanny had profited much by her vist to Manyfields.

Mr Scott was too well-bred to give Fanny a rude answer; he looked too angry to give a polite one. He merely said, "Cre-e-mation, Miss Clarcke! cre-e-mation!" I do not think Louisa quite liked Fanny's speech, and I rather imagine she would have melted into politeness towards Mr Scott had he not looked at me and laughed when he exclaimed "Cre-e-mation!"

"Ex-actly!" I had replied.

"We do not go in for the old Dows at all! we are not . . . not sufficiently . . . " Louisa paused and looked at me . . . "good-natured," said she, pouting.

"Thanks, awfully!" said I—"awfully!"

Louisa repeated, with a vain little toss of her pretty head—"Don't go in for being good-natured!"

"You tie in too well, Louisa," I answered, remembering the girls' former conversation.

"And I suppose that is a crime, Sophy," said Fanny, testily; "but Louisa and I don't pretend to be stout and unfashionable." Fanny cast an admiring eye upon her own tight skirt.

But now, really, the two girls were quite too more than rude and touchy! now, really they were! I supposed they must have driven home together in the waggonette in quite too more than forsaken desolation, without any admirer to keep them in good-humour. So I inquired, and found that even Rigardy-Wrenstone had left them, saying he would walk on to Manyfields.

Mr Scott opened his eyes at Fanny's speech, and then was seized with a fit of uncontrollable laughter. The two girls took it for granted he laughed at their wit; so, wishing to excite still greater admiration, they both "chaffed" me in what they doubtless considered a quite too more than awfully brilliant manner.

They called me "clever and agreeable." I knew what that meant. They "chaffed" me about my quite too more than utterly fascinating conversation. They begged me to fascinate them, but in the same breath they declared Sophy had better wait till ex-actly fifty years hence—ex-actly! When they were past seventy, they knew they would find Sophy an awfully agreeable old maid—awfully! and more

improving even than her Aunt Jane. They "chaffed" me about Aunt Jane and my lively Uncle Sherbrook, and they ended by asking how on earth I spent my day at Sherbrook Hall.

"In the morning," said I, "I walk on the back avenue and listen to Aunt Jane; in the afternoon, I walk on the front avenue, and listen to Aunt Jane and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart; in the evening, I talk to Uncle Sherbrook of the weather."

How this answer did amuse them! and no wonder! They vowed such a life would drive them mad in three days. But they did not pity me! On the contrary, I saw they considered me admirably suited to this "awfully slow and quite too more than utterly unendurable sort of existence." It gave me a pang to feel these lively young ladies were quite sure I had been born on purpose to do dull things and talk to dull people—in a word, to lead the life they themselves most hated, and never would consent to live.

But I was silent. I smiled to their laughter, for I would not betray my secret disappointment to their unsympathetic gaze.

The sound of wheels and trotting horses put a stop to the Clarckes' quite too more than utterly original chaff: Rigardy-Wrenstone, Mr Tankney, and Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup were in the hall! Fanny ran out to receive the gentlemen, and Louisa followed, saying pointedly as she went—"Mr Scott, Fred Tankney has arrived."

I was left alone with Mr David Scott. He was at

one end of the room, and I stood at the other. He crossed the room, and standing near me, said in his quick, indignant way, "I have no patience with those girls! Flighty, cremating young ladies! They laugh loudly, Miss Thursley, at a sort of life they could not lead themselves—not they! They might have some pity—they who would hate to be buried alive! We all hate it! We hate to be buried when we are alive and young. But the world has hardened Louisa. A horrid fast set has ruined her!" This was said in a most irritated voice; and then, in a gentler one, "She once was soft enough." These words seemed to escape against his will, for no sooner were they spoken than Mr Scott abruptly changed his tone and manner—"How I should enjoy," cried he, gaily—"how I should enjoy shutting up Miss Louisa to cremate alone with your uncle and aunt at Sherbrook Hall! She would come to her senses quickly in that deadly, well-ordered house and place. I am sure the old people are very kind, and all that sort of thing—sure of it; but when I have met your aunt, Miss Thursley, I . . . well . . . I did not think she had much variety or liveliness of mind. She talked of everything in general and the niggers in particular, and she praised those confounded niggers just like my Aunt Arabella. Confound those blacks!" exclaimed Mr Scott vigorously, and then begged pardon for his vehemence. I was actually pleased to hear him say, "Confound those blacks!" I should have liked to say it myself.

"Excuse me, Miss Thursley," he said; "no doubt

you are horribly shocked! for perhaps the pious nigger does not bore you as he does me. All the same, Miss Thursley," he added, kindly, "there are times when I fear you must find life a dull affair; and I pity you —indeed I pity you with all my heart!"

For a moment I did not answer. My astonishment was too great. I could hardly believe my ears. I could hardly believe any human being would go to the trouble of casting even a passing thought upon me and the life I led, or would have the imagination to conceive, plain as I was, that I yet might have some of the feelings, and impatience, and tastes of youth.

"I hope I have said nothing rude, Miss Thursley," said Mr Scott, eagerly. "Allow me to apologise! I am sure your aunt is the best of creatures, and may be a delightful companion for every hour in the day, and for every day in the year; and I am convinced the change from the back avenue to the front must be intensely exciting. I only thought how bored I should feel myself at Sherbrook Hall! But pray forgive me, Miss Thursley; pray don't be offended."

"Offended! I am not offended, Mr Scott, only taken by surprise," I said, turning towards him. "How kind you are," I exclaimed, "to think that I might feel as you would feel! Ah, Mr Scott," I added, bitterly, "for nearly three long dreary years no one in this world has ever thought of me as of himself, and yet I am of the same nature as other people. Yours is the first word of sympathy," cried I, passionately, "which any one has cast upon my wearying,

hopeless life! For my aimless life does weary me, Mr Scott, though no one has ever thought so but you. It wearies me—it wearies me to death!"

I was going to thank him yet again, but I checked myself, and blushed at my own emotion. What I had heard the Clarckes say rushed upon my mind, and filled me with fear and awkwardness, making me think the gushing gratitude of a "dumpy fright" would tease a young man.

Without another word, I ran away. It was late, being just the dinner-hour. The hall was empty. I feared Fanny and Louisa had had time to exchange but little "chaff" and only an odd "Cre-e-mation!" with Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup and Mr Fred Tankney.

CHAPTER XIV.

Sir Harry took down Lady Arabella to dinner: he had Lady Arabella on one arm and her shawl on the other, and he carried her ladyship's smelling-bottle, lozenges, and fan.

Although Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup did not take down Miss Fanny, the young lady was in great spirits, and "chaffed" Mr Fred Tankney. She had Mr Tankney almost to herself, for Louisa hardly spoke a word. Louisa had not yet recovered her good temper. By some mistake of our hostess (I supposed it was a mistake), I happened to find myself seated next to Mr Scott. He talked a great deal to me, and I soon felt quite pleasantly at my ease with him. Louisa sat at the opposite side of the table, rather lower down. Whenever I looked up, I saw her face turned towards me. Her eyes were awake, and seemed to hear every word my neighbour said. It crossed my mind that perhaps he talked so much to me in order to tease Louisa. I thought it very natural he should wish to tease her when she had been so unkind to him, and very improbable that any one would care to talk in an

agreeable, lively way to me, and to amuse me because he liked me.

And I was amused, delighted, carried out of myself, by Mr Scott's conversation. Oh the charm of natural, lively, quick-sighted conversation, spoken glibly, lightly, unburdened by ponderosity, or the wish to improve your moral nature!

Witty words spoken by instinct will awaken an inspiration to answer in your own mind which will surprise you. The sudden flash of wit in others, makes one feel a wit one's self; and nothing on earth is so delightful as to be deceived into the impression you have wit. Wit is a revelation: you see where you were blind; it is a sudden lighting up of all the mind. To me it was like a rising from the dead, to feel my dulled thoughts flash into sudden life.

Mr Scott said many brilliant, witty things to me. I cannot say if I really said anything witty to him—I merely know he had the art to make me feel as if I did.

But I only half remember our delightful conversation, and if I could I would not repeat it in cold blood. I should not dare, for fear I might find the sprightly liveliness was but poor stuff after all; for wit is a dainty dish which should be taken hot,—much of it is cold hash for the morrow.

Since my mother's death I had considered the necessity of listening to the talk of others and of talking myself of the weather as the chief trial of life. I had forgotten there could be a pleasure in conversation.

So the discovered delight came upon me as a great surprise.

We were nearly two hours at dinner, and it seemed like ten minutes! I need hardly say that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle hurried from the dining-room to the piano. Lady Arabella, on the contrary, astonished me. She turned over the pages for Miss Warbattle, and exclaimed, at appropriate intervals,—"Sweetly pretty! Quite charming! Wonderful counterpoint! A real *tour de force!* So exquisitely original! Marvellous harmony! Too delicious!" In fact, she entirely devoted herself to keeping her amateur *artistes* in good-humour, and she seemed to have abdicated her own right to play and sing. I supposed Lady Arabella was trying to atone for having shut the double doors on Schumann.

Fanny and Louisa, seated sideways on the back-to-back ottoman, kept up a whispered conversation with each other. Fanny seemed amused, and Louisa annoyed. I could not help thinking they were whispering about me, for they looked at me continually. Young ladies who are quite too more than rapid do not care to have good manners.

Fanny looked at me and laughed. Louisa scanned me from top to toe. I felt her eyes were taking in every defect of my dress and person: when she whispered to Fanny, she did not look at her, but kept a fixed gaze on me. I wondered if she were saying,—"What an awful bore for David Scott! How he does hate plain girls!" and repeating what she had said

before, "It is not he who speaks to them, but they to him." I tried to remember if I had spoken most to him or he to me. I feared I had talked a great deal, and I was ashamed to think how glad I had been to talk with him. I hoped I had not bored him, yet dreaded that I had. I greatly feared I had bored him. I made a vow I would not speak to him again. I made a vow I would keep far off, out of temptation; so, taking up a newspaper, I crossed the room, and sat right away from the door by the pagoda-like chimneypiece. I thought I would read the newspaper and look at no one.

I read attentively until Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup came in from the dining-room: he excited my curiosity so much more than the 'Morning Post,' that I could not help observing him. The very instant he entered the room, he seemed to perceive Lady Arabella's shawl was lying untidily on the back of a chair. He folded it neatly—I might say respectfully. He noticed Lady Arabella had dropped her handkerchief; he picked it up. He saw her ladyship was without her smelling-bottle; he gave it to her. He discovered she had mislaid her lozenges; he searched for them zealously, and when he had found them, could not rest till Lady Arabella had taken one. He insisted on getting Lady Arabella a comfortable chair. He rang the bell for tea. He slid about quietly, and created no commotion, except when he spoke. He spoke seldom and little: he had a stutter; yet, for some unaccountable reason, the few words he did say made a great sensation. When

Sir Harry opened his mouth, Mr Fred Tankney laughed, Fanny and Louisa laughed, and Sir Harry himself laughed. They even laughed before the brilliant inventor of "Cremation!" actually spoke. When "Cre-e-mation!" did come out, it convulsed them all. "Cre-e-mation" was an "awful joke." Sir Harry himself seemed to be an "awful joke"—a joke even when he held his tongue—a standard joke, and the embodiment of all the standard jokes at Manyfields; or, to speak more correctly, the butt of the jokes—the centre of all the horsey, awful-spill sort of "chaff." Evidently Sir Harry liked to be "chaffed," and expected to be chaffed. I supposed he liked the chaff because it made him feel such an "awful joke," and I imagined, had he not felt such an "awful joke" he never could have fancied he was a man of infinite humour. I saw that Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup did think himself a perfect wag—almost as great a wit as Mr Fred Tankney and the Clarckes were pleased to consider him.

I perceived, to my amusement, that Denis seemed quite put out at the way Sir Harry was monopolising the general attention and chaff. He fidgeted uneasily about the room, and at length left the region of Sir Harry's pre-eminence and came over to the fireplace where I sat. He shot down his shirt-cuffs—"shot his linen," as Fanny Clarcke calls the trick—standing beside me. Denis was civility itself to me at Mineham. My cousin's manner differs according to the place where he meets you. He will patronise you

openly in a house of the "right sort," especially if the right sort of people do not snub you. I felt that Lady Arabella's friendly kindness towards me had affected Rigardy-Wrenstone's imagination.

"What an awful joke Sir Harry is!" cried I, in the language of Manyfields; "awful fun chaffing him! seems to like it awfully!"

"Queer fellow," exclaimed Rigardy-Wrenstone; "queerest fellow ever met in my life! Likes to be made a fool of! Got a taste for the thing! Been so long the laughing-stock at Manyfields, likes to be laughed at! likes to be chaffed! Lady Offaway awfully down upon him! chaffs him unmercifully! and he takes it as a compliment! Never thinks of chaffing a fellow himself, unless my lady tells him. Sometimes she sets him to chaff the aborigines; awful joke to hear him! Lady Offaway sits upon him afterwards. By George, he would do anything to curry favour with her! Never saw such a man! perfect tame cat!" My cousin lowered his voice. "Born toady," he said, with a look of intense contempt; "must always be toadying some one; takes to it naturally. Toadies the lady of the house. Does tame cat and led captain to Lady Arabella. By George, Sophy, there he is, down on one knee! turned himself into a music-desk for Lady Arabella!"

Rigardy-Wrenstone could not stand this. It was clearly quite too more than too much for him. In next to no time he had supplanted Sir Harry, and was himself holding the music-book for Lady Arabella.

Miss Warbattle had strongly advised Lady Arabella to follow the score of the symphony she and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone were playing.

Our hostess looked as if she liked having Denis for a music-stand much better than she did Sir Harry. From her manner towards Sir Harry Hardup, I knew she did not fancy him. I daresay she despised a man who could be tame cat to Lady Offaway.

Strange to add, Sir Harry did not seem a bit annoyed. Perhaps it was an "awful joke" for Denis to supplant him beside the lady of the house—a joke after the pattern and practice of Manyfields. Undoubtedly, Sir Harry seemed quite accustomed to the sort of thing. He let himself be handed over as a matter of course from one lady to another.

Fanny Clarcke accepted him from Lady Arabella, and secured him by means of a new skein of wool. He sat on a stool at her feet; he held up both hands, and she wound the worsted at her leisure. But now really, that dear, delightful Sir Harry did prove so utterly original, and so quite too more than utterly amusing, that Fanny, to use her own elegant expression, "split!"

Mr Tankney "chaffed" Sir Harry, and it was such awful fun, that Louisa chaffed him too.

Miss Warbattle naturally found all this "chaffing" and laughing an interruption to the serious business of life, so she requested the whole party of chaffers to go into the billiard-room.

Mr David Scott had been standing near Louisa.

During dinner she had seemed to long for every word he spoke; but the very instant it was in her power to speak to him, she turned away in the most marked manner, and "chaffed" with Mr Tankney. I could not understand her. When she followed Fanny, Sir Harry, and Mr Fred Tankney into the billiard-room, she looked back at Mr Scott, and appeared to expect he would come too. For an instant she stood still, as if stayed by a sudden impulse to return—then walked on. But he did not follow her. I doubt if he even noticed her momentary hesitation: he seemed absorbed in his own thoughts, and looked as if they were bitter ones. I saw his look; I could not help seeing it—my newspaper had fallen to the ground. I pitied him with a deep, strong pity. Such pity rose unbidden in my heart, because I could so easily conceive his feelings: it was easy for me to understand the pain of disappointed hope and unsatisfied affection.

It is in the very nature of pity to carry us far from self, and make us forget all other feelings in that one.

Mr David Scott took a chair beside me. At first he sat almost in silence, then suddenly broke forth into vehement speech, as if his thoughts must breathe aloud or stifle him. As he spoke, I forgot my appearance, and vows of silence and reserve; I forgot all about myself in the yearning to be kind. He spoke bitterly, very bitterly, of the difference it makes in life to be nobody or somebody. He inveighed against the worldliness of women, who soon let a man know

what his prospects really are. "But a man," he said, "would not care for their slights if he had a career before him—an open field where he could gallop away from worry, and ride in the first flight." He told me that once he had had a career, a life, before him, while now he had nothing but dead stagnation. "Dead stagnation and my aunt's niggers! or some hateful office! I am too old," he said, "for the army, and I should hate to be some wretched clerk, toiling without hope; that is an intolerable lot for a man when his ambition has been roused, and he has felt a future worth having within his grasp. Present insignificance is nothing if you feel there is a future before you. But you cannot be happy slaving in the dark for nothing, when you have worked in broad daylight with an open career right before your eyes." He repeated, "I had a life before me once."

And then, as if moved by an irresistible impulse, he opened his heart to me, and told me his whole story—the story of his shattered hopes, his ruined career, and even of his disappointed love. He seemed to be carried on, in spite of himself, to talk of his broken engagement and of Louisa. He told me he was glad she had not married him according to her promise—very glad; that he almost hated her now. Passion trembled in his voice as he spoke. I had never heard any one speak like this before. He was stirred by the tale he told, and he spoke with power and eloquence. He has the gift of living, changing speech: his words take the colour of his thoughts, and change as they

change ; his speech has a life of its own. His very voice moved me.

Truly it was with joy I gave him the sympathy he asked, for there is pleasure in giving away what has lain from year to year unclaimed in your heart. One tires of living like an unlucky pedlar with a pack of useless wares: our unsought goods become a burden, and we give them with an open hand.

It came to pass, that as I listened to David Scott, I forgot to look around me, or to think of other people. I forgot Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's eye-glass, Miss Warbattle, Lady Arabella, my cousin—everybody! I did not even notice when the music ceased.

I was startled into sudden remembrance by Lady Arabella—she touched me on the shoulder, and wondered if I had quite forgotten the time. She said the concert would take place at twelve next day, and that we should all have to be up at some unearthly hour. I looked round: Mr Tankney, Sir Harry, the Clarckes, every one, was in the room! They were all standing waiting to say good-night. I saw the eye-glass was upon me. I felt Louisa's eye ; indeed I felt every eye in the room. I knew Mr Scott and I were the observed of all observers. There was a perceptible smile on every face, except on Louisa's and Miss Warbattle's.

The awkwardness of that moment confused the plain woman.

CHAPTER XV.

I CAME down very late next morning. I did so on purpose. I was much relieved to find Mr Scott had already breakfasted, and was engaged superintending the arrangement of the Chinese music-room.

The whole county came to Lady Arabella's concert, with the exception of the Marchioness of Offaway and the "person" from Tank Court. It would not have been pleasant for the "person" to face the frowns of the county ladies.

Aunt Jane had intended driving over to Mineham for the day. She was, however, prevented from assisting at the work of charity by "poor dear Catherine's ankle. Poor dear Catherine's ankle is so much swelled that the cold compress has to be renewed every two hours." Aunt Jane wrote to beg I would give this excuse for her absence in answer to all inquiries. She feared people might be offended at her absence; but no one I spoke to seemed a bit angry with Aunt Jane. It was quite different in Lady Offaway's case: from many remarks I heard, I gathered that her absence did give offence. I noticed, it is true, that

one or two ladies were not perhaps so much offended with Lady Offaway as with themselves for being where the Marchioness was not: they made excuses to each other as if it were necessary to explain why they came to hear music Lady Offaway did not care to hear. Mrs Pastley said that now really she never would have driven all that long distance, only for poor dear Lady Arabella—"Poor dear Lady Arabella! She does so like you to patronise her African converts! She quite takes it as a compliment, you know. But really, you know, another time one would be tempted to take the tickets and send the servants."

The concert began with a solo from Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. Never in my life, either before or since, have I heard her in such good voice—it almost seemed as if she had a voice. Yet the song was only pretty well received. The audience knew who Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was, so they clapped her; but they did not clap much, because the Abbey people were not as popular as they might be.

Miss Warbattle then played a Schumann. It fell dreadfully flat, although it was not a posthumous. Miss Warbattle had practised indefatigably for days; and this was the miserable result! I pitied her so much that I exclaimed aloud, "So exquisitely classical!" I wanted to say something complimentary, and did not exactly know what. "So exquisitely classical!" was only taken up by a few of the people seated near me. Miss Warbattle deserved better treatment. But the fact is, Miss Warbattle was only one of "that

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's importations." Lord George's fame had not reached Dullshire, so I fancy nobody realised his niece was one of the Dumbledore-War-battles. Dullshire merely knew she was not related to any of the county people. Now if those same county people do not happen to know who a lady is, they take it for granted she is no one, and judge accordingly the musical genius of that sallow sort of person who goes about with that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone.

In Dullshire the Clarckes were also "those two girls, some kind of cousins, who go about with that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone." Louisa sang with Tiney under one arm. Two county ladies near me exclaimed —"Nasty little black dog! How ridiculous!" I could not help thinking they might have said, "*What a duck of a little black angel! How utterly original!*" had they but only known Lady Offaway never sang without having a dog under each arm. I am aware it was not then generally known in the county that the Clarckes had stayed four days at Manyfields. I am sure this fact would have elicited a "sweetly pretty" or a "quite charmingly performed" from Mrs Pastley and half-a-dozen others. The duet Fanny and Louisa sang was just the sort of trashy thing naturally suited to the audience; and it was an Italian one—not even an English song: English might have sounded beneath the dignity of the occasion. Still no applause worth mentioning greeted the poor Clarckes' song.

Sir Harry and his German flute came next. The variations were ludicrous. They were abominably

played, except some repeating-notes which seemed to let themselves be blown with comparatively little effort from Sir Harry's lip: Sir Harry stuttered, as it were, instinctively through the flute.

Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup—Lady Offaway's tame cat! Nobody thought anything of Sir Harry; but then everybody knew Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup! Ruined himself, poor fellow! such a fine property! ran through everything in no time! Dullshire knew all about him. He was by no means unpopular; and his mother was a Pastley, and the Pastleys were proud of the Hardup-Hardup connection, and the Hardups always acknowledged the Pastleys. Sir Harry never cut his relations or gave himself airs like Rigardy-Wrenstone. So *My Lodging is on the Cold Ground* and all the variations were enthusiastically encored.

Miss Warbattle winced during the painful operation. Her own most difficult Brahms, with the voice accompaniment sung by Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, was next on the list. It gained so little applause that the poor Drill-sergeant lost her temper, and did not sing again. I felt for her: she had thrown heart and soul into the performance. I clapped till people stared at me, and tried, "So exquisitely classical!" but with even less success than before. The composure and dignity of Miss Warbattle under these trying circumstances filled me with admiration, and I conceived a respect for her, because I saw she was content to sacrifice personal applause to what she considered her great

mission in life. When she played her Brahms to an unappreciative country audience, you could see she felt she had done her duty: she had educated the ignorant. Teachers worthy of the name educate the ignorant against their will. I think Miss Warbattle liked educating the unclassical world against its will. There is a ludicrous side to such a mission in life! And yet there must be something almost grand and noble about an amateur musician who can prefer anything on earth to personal applause.

Louisa and Mr Tankney sang a duet. For a moment, I thought no one would clap them. It seemed as if each person hesitated to applaud first. But then, on second thoughts, the audience clapped, and sufficiently to prevent the song from being a fiasco. Mr Tankney has a beautiful voice: I doubt if such a tenor had ever been heard in Dullshire. I could not understand the visible hesitation, till I remembered that Mr Fred Tankney's social position in the county was as yet undefined. I felt convinced, the generally believed report that Mr Tankney would some day be his father's heir was the second thought which, on reflection, made county ladies applaud. What afterwards occurred strengthened this conviction.

I think the next song came as a surprise both to Miss Warbattle and to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. It was not in the programme. It proved to be a *deus ex machinâ* who put everything to rights, and of a sudden turned the concert into a decided success. Lady Ara-

bella and Mr Fred Tankney most unexpectedly sang a duet for Sambo.

Poor dear Lady Arabella! she was a little hoarse, but not so very hoarse after all. The audience had often heard her sing with a worse cold in her throat; besides, it does not much matter in Dullshire if you are in good voice or bad—the important point is, who you are, and not how you sing, or even what you sing. The duet was the same *amor-cuor-traditor* affair Lady Arabella and Mr Tankney had practised the other night. The song was rapturously encored, and sung again by Lady Arabella with as much rapture as it was received.

Such a pity for Mr Tankney this *amor-cuor* was not performed earlier in the day! I am sure his duet with Louisa Clarcke would then have been a great success instead of half a failure.

As Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone did not care to sing again, and Fanny and Louisa had sung the only songs they could sing, and Sir Harry had exhausted the *repertoire* of his flute, Mr Fred Tankney sang a solo. Miss Warbattle insisted on its being a very serious Schumann—not one of the beautiful lighter songs, but a posthumous. I may be mistaken, and Schumann may never have sung in his grave, but the monotone sounded like a posthumous of the heavier sort. Yet the audience went wild with delight! The vigorous clapping recalled to my mind Lady Arabella's words: "I can take Mr Tankney up or let him down, and society will do the same."

When people were leaving the Chinese music-room, I heard them declare the concert went off beautifully. "Such a success!" "Really, Sir Harry plays the flute deliciously!" "Now positively," said one lady, "Lady Arabella was in wonderful voice! and that Mr Fred Tankney does sing exquisitely, you know!" "Quite a treat!" said another; "charming talent for music! And I really do suppose Lord Tankney intends to make him his heir; Lady Arabella must be certain of it, or she would never have him staying in the house." "Sir John Moultrie," remarked a third, "says there is £30,000 a-year in a ring-fence; and he ought to be right." "Yes, to be sure! His poor dear sister, you know!" "Well, well! let bygones be bygones!" "Geraldine, my dear," said a lady standing just beside me, to her daughter—"Geraldine, I wish you would not stoop;" then added, in an audible whisper, "If Mr Tankney should offer to take you in to luncheon, you need not refuse." "But, mamma," answered the girl, "I thought papa said——" "My dear, my dear, just hold up your head!"

The luncheon was for the benefit of the blacks. You took tickets as if you were at a charity bazaar. Lady Arabella is never mean except in the cause of charity. I heard one lady who was buying a ticket say, "Lady Arabella can do it,—she is so original, you know!—but I don't think everybody could. And Lady Arabella is quite put out if you run away before luncheon or bring your own sandwiches!—quite put out, you know!"

Mr Scott was so busy doing the honours for his aunt and Sambo, that I slipped away without bidding him good-bye. I left early. Uncle Sherbrook sent me a very particular message by Robert, begging that I would not keep the horses waiting.

The instant I got home I exclaimed, "Cremation, Aunt Jane! let me tie you in! for now positively you are quite too more than utterly ludicrous! Cre-e-mation! you are!"

"Cremation!" cried my aunt, almost gasping for breath; "you sound as if you were swearing, Sophy. From whom did you learn that dreadful expression?"

"Why, from Sir Harry Hardup, to be sure, and his admirers!—that dear, delightful Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup!"

"Sir Harry Hardup!" groaned my aunt. "Was he at Mineham?"

"Certainly! and so was Mr Fred Tankney. All the pious people were there, — and so interested in the welfare of the blacks! They could talk of nothing else."

"Well," replied my aunt, "I am glad to hear that; and I hope they reflected very, very seriously upon the object of the concert. But I am not surprised to hear they talked so much of the African converts (Sophy, I wish you would not call them blacks). I am not at all surprised — although Mr Tankney must be a queer man, and I know Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup is very queer—because I will say that, wherever Lady Arabella is, she always does try to promote edifying

and useful conversation. When she comes here and I go to Mineham, I feel spiritually refreshed, Sophy,—and even for days afterwards."

I saw Aunt Jane was sincerely convinced she and Lady Arabella intermarried none but the blacks. The hallucination did not astonish me, for I knew my aunt had the power of being sincerely under wrong impressions. I did not argue the matter with Aunt Jane,—I only exclaimed aloud, "Cre-e-mation!"

"Oh, Catherine! Catherine!" cried Aunt Jane, "is it not dreadful? Sophy says *cremation!* and Mr Fred Tankney always says *cremation!* and it sounds like swearing!"

I remarked, "Not Mr Fred Tankney, but Sir Harry Hardup."

"Now, Sophy, you know you said Mr Fred Tankney was at Mineham."

"So he was, Aunt Jane, but——"

"Then why do you interrupt me, Sophy? You are always interrupting and contradicting, and Catherine has never contradicted me the whole time you have been away! Yes, Catherine, Mr Tankney was at Mineham, and Sophy met him; and was not that dreadful? because he is received nowhere. Oh, Catherine, are not you amazed to hear Lady Arabella asked him?"

I looked at the admirable Catherine. She lay on a sofa tatting the steeple. She was going to speak, but stopped abruptly, and counted her stitches instead.

"Aunt Jane," said I, "Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart cannot feel surprised to hear Lady Arabella Scott fol-

lowed her advice. It was she advised Lady Arabella to invite Mr Tankney: Lady Arabella told me so. Mrs Stewart brought them together, and said it did not matter how equivocal Mr Tankney's position might be, people would be delighted to meet him, as Lord Tankney had an incurable disease, and Mr Tankney had a voice and 'expectations.' 'Expectations,' it appears, mean £30,000 a-year and a dying father!"

Mrs Stewart did not contradict me: she never belies the truth, unless the denial is sure to be successful. "My dear Mrs Sherbrook," she exclaimed, "it is not for us to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children."

"Just what you said to Lady Arabella," cried I; "and, Mrs Stewart, you also remarked, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'"

"And Catherine was quite right to say that, Sophy," said Aunt Jane, "because that text is in Holy Scripture; and Scripture is given us not only for reproof but also for quotation, and Mr Thunderbore said so last Sunday; but I don't think you ever really attend to the sermon, Sophy."

The best of women now had a fair start. She quite justified and sanctified the worldly advice she had given Lady Arabella. I was much edified by all Mrs Stewart, said; and I perceived, for the first time in my life, what I have often noticed since, that worldliness is a beautiful thing if wrapped in Christian charity.

CHAPTER XVI.

On my return from Mineham, I thought Uncle Sherbrook looking ill. He was decidedly yellower than usual, and he seemed to be in low spirits. I tried to enliven him by taking a cheerful view of the weather. "Well, Uncle Sherbrook," I said, "we have had a mild February and a mild March, and a westerly wind in April."

But my uncle only sighed and shivered: "What arrears of east wind we shall have to pay in May and June!" groaned he. I was seriously concerned for the dear old Christian gentleman's liver.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart drove out every afternoon with Aunt Jane. She kept up her foot on the back seat, and she took so many cushions and shawls that I rejoice to say there was no room left in the family coach for "Sophy."

The mule and Dan still lived on at Sherbrook Hall, so as to be ready when wanted; but Aunt Jane declared Catherine should never drive that dreadful, wicked mule again.

The day after my return, Uncle Sherbrook and I

walked on the front avenue. Aunt Jane told us to walk there, for Mrs Stewart had hoped, if Sophy were left alone with her uncle, that she would not make him wet his feet.

But the next day, seeing my uncle looked ill and depressed, I said to him, "Uncle Sherbrook, shall we walk on the path over the hill? You and I took a turn there once, and you told me all about that right-of-way. Was it ten years, or only nine, your famous lawsuit lasted?"

"Ten," replied my uncle, brightening—"ten, Sophy. I see you have a bad memory, and I therefore presume you have forgotten all but the leading features of that lawsuit; and," he added, with animation, "a few clear details are necessary, if you wish properly to appreciate the clever manner in which Jones handled the case; so we will just talk the matter over as we go along. I should like you to have a clear idea of the difficulties we had to contend with; for although the point at issue was a simple question of right-of-way, the interests involved were both numerous and complicated." And so they were!

We went by the beech-tree, past the garden-gate, and down through the laurels. Leaving Aunt Jane's crockery-rockery summer-house to our left, we continued in the hollow until we came to the path which led over the hill. The complications of the interests involved in the famous lawsuit lasted the whole time: they lasted from the bottom to the top of the hill, to the second gate which barred the right-of-way. As

well as I could make out, these gates were erected by Act of Parliament. Uncle Sherbrook unlocked them by special Act of Parliament,—at least so I thought from the look of him.

Just inside the second gate, dreadful to relate! we met a little puppy-dog trespassing on the right-of-way. I believed this to be a capital offence. Uncle Sherbrook said it was punishable by the law of the land, and his serious face cast sentence of death upon the offending cur. He frightened the puppy by staring at it, so the creature put its tail between its legs and ran to me. My uncle said he would take the dog to the front lodge and leave it there until he had consulted Mr Buggle. "I think Buggle was to be in Harefield this afternoon, Sophy; though Jones," muttered he, "knows more of this case." Then, as if his conscience were ashamed, he exclaimed, "But I will consult Buggle."

Uncle Sherbrook gave me the keys of the two gates, and told me not to wait more than an hour for him. "If I am not here an hour hence, Sophy, you will know I have found Buggle, and am detained by business. If detained, I shall return the shorter way by the front avenue."

My uncle whistled to the puppy; but it stuck to me, played with the skirt of my dress, and would not follow him, so he was forced to bend down and pick up the squealing doggy: he carried it by the nape of the neck solemnly, as if to execution. Uncle Sherbrook walked on, and I turned to hide a rising smile.

I was not uneasy as to the puppy's fate: I knew my uncle would be quite satisfied the dog should live when he had clearly established his right to kill it.

I was glad Uncle Sherbrook had caught a trespasser, however small, as I knew this little excitement would raise his circulation and his spirits; and then I was glad for my own sake too: I felt very glad to be left alone.

The air was bright with sunshine, and quite warm for the time of year, and I had longed to enjoy in silence the beauty of this April day.

I had asked my uncle to stop a moment at the top of the meadow, on the brow of the hill, just before we came to the second gate. The country for miles lay stretched under our feet. But my uncle wished I would not interrupt him; he said he did not care to look at an ill-drained plain, and remarked that Jack Jones farmed his land badly. Uncle Sherbrook saw nothing but Jack Jones's fields in the view before us, and he thought them an ugly sight. To my mind the far-reaching view was not ugly: all lands have a beauty of their own in spring; besides, I liked the open freedom of the plain below. I did not feel shut in. I breathed, and I forgot that life is a narrow valley. The imagination loves to roam an open country like the one I looked upon, stretching to far-distant hills: a haze hung over those distant hills, so that you could not mark their outline upon the sky. There was no rent in the soft cloud—no separating death between the spirit of this earth and heaven. The blue hills

melted into the sky like the last earth-born thought of a man rising with his soul above—a thought begun on earth to end in heaven: rising with a sigh in man's last sleep, thought I; for a soft air came from those distant hills, and seemed like a sigh of joy coming over the budding fields—joy that winter was passing into spring! The sighing air was not a wind stirring the peaceful earth, but rather a living calm, like a joy which moves yet lulls the heart; it was a gentle breath to the primrose and violet, to the daisy and opening buttercup. The birds did not disturb this soothing calm: their song has no distracting passion in it for our mind. On a fine day in early spring, that sweet song of birds is in the air we breathe, and we breathe it without knowing that we breathe. We feel the birds are singing; we do not listen to hear. The music blends with our lulled thoughts in very tuneful harmony; and so does the music of that other sound we feel—the sound which passes over waving grass and boughs of trees,—a sound wafting to our ear, from time to time, the lowing of a cow, the bark of the cottager's dog, the bleating of a lamb, or the far-off voices of men — voices from another world! for we think they are not of this one: hallowed by the distance, there is so strange a note in them, that we remember the voices we never thought to hear again. We remember our dead, but not with sorrow in an hour like this. The Spirit of God is upon the earth in the hour of its awaking beauty; and it seems near to heaven, and we to the near presence of some holy joy.

I leant upon the gate. I shut my eyes so as better to feel that near presence and the rapture of those distant sounds. The far-off voices gave me pleasant dreams, and when the voices ceased, I still dreamt on: there were dreams in the very air, in the violet-scented bank close by, in the buzz of insects—and dreams in that warble of the birds. Suddenly I was startled by the sound of a footstep. I opened my eyes, and I saw a man walking up by the path through the meadow towards the gate on which I leant. He came from the far-stretching country of my pleasant dreams, like the spirit of one of the distant voices I had heard.

Awaking still more, I saw it was Mr David Scott who walked towards me, so I opened the gate and went down to meet him. I was glad to see him: it seemed so natural to feel glad amidst the sights and sounds of this sweet April day. I met him filled with the calm joy around me; gravely glad, without tremor or self-conscious shyness. He too was glad to see me; but he did not seem surprised to meet me, for he said he had seen me from the road below.

We walked on together; and when we gained the brow of the hill, he turned to look at the view which lay behind us. Seeing he was not insensible to the beauty of the hour, I told him just to listen for one moment to all the sounds and songs that filled the air.

We both stood still; and as we listened, we heard the cuckoo in a distant wood—so distant indeed, that it was more like the echo of last year's note than the

fresh, strong one of this year's spring. We heard it three times, and then it was gone! I heard the cuckoo's first note with great delight; there is a startling beauty in the sound.

All men who are fond of field-sports like to hear the first note of a winter-hidden bird. Mr Scott listened again, but the voice was silent and would not awake. He spoke of the cuckoo's strange disappearance during so many months of the year. He seemed well acquainted with the habits of most birds, and particularly, I thought, of snipe, teal, wild-duck, and grouse: he also, I must allow, appeared to delight in shooting them. He talked with almost passionate regret of the Clinchfisted grouse-moors, where he used to have such excellent sport. I perceived he was a man who took a passionate delight in all that pleased him. I liked this warmth; but I understood it better when he passed from bemoaning grouse-moors to grieving over the serious losses of his life. He apologised to me for speaking again and always on the same subject; but he said the boredom of his present purposeless existence made him regret his lost career, till the regret became an intolerable irritation which he hated keeping to himself, and longed to vent on some one.

"I can't let off steam to my aunt," said he, "for I see she thinks I ought to be content with my glorious career at Mineham; but a man cannot live a woman's petty life! Vexation worries him twice as much as it does her."

"Does it?" said I.

"Not a doubt of it," he answered, as if the matter were a certainty: "women are born to be worried; and indeed they take to it so naturally, that hardly one of them can understand a man's impatient, insupportable annoyance when he is thwarted. It is no good talking to them: they have not an idea what you really mean." He paused; then added, in that thrilling voice of his which impresses all he says upon your memory, and which rings in your ear afterwards, making you remember what he has said, even if it be a little, unimportant nothing, better soon forgotten— "But you, Miss Thursley," he added, "I know that you understand my intolerable irritation, my despair. I can speak to you as if I were speaking aloud to myself. I feel at my ease in speaking to you. I came up here on purpose to talk to you, when I saw from down below that Mr Sherbrook had left you, and you were alone. I should like to meet you, Miss Thursley, and speak to you, every day of my life, until I bored you and you would listen to me no longer."

"You would never bore me," said I, gravely; "I would listen to you a long time." There was something in the tone of my own voice, as I said these words, which startled me: it was as if it had caught the thrill of his voice. "No, no!" I exclaimed, laughing, "you would not bore me, because you are neither pompous nor pedantic. You say what you think, and not what you fancy you ought to think. All you say is true, and I feel for you as for a real man. You are no

irreproachable prig, Mr Scott; you have lost heart for the battle of life, and you say so. If you cannot fight as a leader, you do not care to fight as a common man; you have not the courage to become no one. You do not pretend to a bravery you have not got!"

Mr Scott seemed to think there were two sides to this laughing compliment. He took fire at what I said. "Bravery" brought the colour to his face and a flow of words to his lips. He tried to prove to me, and I think also to himself, that it would be cowardice in him to accept any sort of obscure, uncongenial toil, when he would hate it so intensely that he could but fulfil the duty badly, whatever it might be, and keep out some better man. He seemed to think it far more courageous to bear the irritation of enforced idleness: "For then you do not give up the game. You are ready if a lucky chance befriends you. You are not lost in the backwoods. You have not gone out to the colonies, or shelved yourself at home. If the old career comes within your grasp, you are there to take hold of it, and you are the same man as before: you are not roughened into a barbarian, or changed into an idiot and a copying-clerk."

"But should the chance never come, where are you?"

"It must come!" he retorted, with energetic conviction—"it must come some day! Every fellow gets a chance in life."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, "you surely do not expect the Clinchfisted babies will get the croup and die?

Such babies are always remarkably healthy, and not a bit good-natured. They never think of dying to make room for the man they have ruined."

No; Mr Scott did not expect this. Indeed I could see the Clinchfisted infants had never entered his head. It was not easy to make out what lucky chance he expected, or what he was thinking of. Perhaps he did not know himself. Or perhaps, thought I, he does not like to tell me. Lady Arabella may have invented an heiress for him, and he may have her now in his mind's eye. I could not think of any Dullshire heiress. I hoped, wherever the lady came from, she would be worthy of him. I hoped she would understand him; for I did not think every woman would understand him, and I feared he might be very unhappy with an unsympathetic wife. Naturally enough, I did not like to ask about the heiress; and as he never alluded to any idea of the sort, I was uncertain, after all, whether he did not rely on some unforeseen accident of which he had no clear conception—a vague lucky chance which every fellow gets in life! I saw he was so anxious the chance should come, that he believed it must come. He waxed eloquent on the subject; it excited him, and he is always eloquent when moved.

As I listened to him, I grew to believe what he believed. To that ear of mine which had been bored these long years, he was so eloquent, that I came to think those who had heard him at Westminster must long to hear him again. I felt convinced the Carlton

Club would wish to return such a clever speaker at the next election. Like Aunt Jane, I had a notion the Carlton returned remarkable young statesmen at its own expense, without costing the young statesman a penny; so I considered the heiress quite unnecessary, and was glad to put her out of the question.

Mr David Scott dwelt enthusiastically upon the delightful excitement of a political career. I saw he could not forget the sensation his maiden speech had made. Applause had roused his ambition—the ambition to make a name in England. Such ambition seemed noble to me, accustomed as I was to no ambition at all, or to none higher than a parochial ambition,—the ambition to worry your neighbour, to patronise your parson, to copy the ways and manners of a titled vulgarian because she is a titled county magnate, and keeps a big establishment, and has her house full of gay people bent on amusement; or the ambition to immortalise your name and arms upon the village inn!

I much encouraged Mr Scott to speak of that time when his ambition and his hopes were roused. I liked to hear him speak of it. I did not consider what he said vain or foolish. I was in no censorious mood. It gave me pleasure to be persuaded of his talent. I longed to think him some uncommon man—a man to make his mark in life, and not one doomed, like those around me, to silent insignificance.

I felt as if he could never talk enough of that large career he once had almost made his own. I loved to

listen to him, and I loved to watch him as he spoke: his eye, his face, his hand, were full of life. He is not what people call a handsome man. His colouring and his features leave no particular impression on your mind unless you know him very well. It is the expression of the face which you remember—the life of the eye.

His figure is well proportioned and rather tall. As he talked, he leant backwards with his left elbow resting on the highest bar of the gate, and one foot on the lowest. He kept his right hand free.

This is one of the pictures in my life. I see it now as it was then. The softly tinted sky, marking the outline of his figure, has not faded. His eloquent lips are parted; his eager eye still speaks; his hand yet lives. Time has passed over the picture and left it undimmed. The violet-scented bank on which I sat is there unchanged before my eyes; I turn, and still listen, and I hear his voice—that voice which I can never hear without a thrill of joy or pain!

When that voice is in my ear I forget the passing hours.

I knew not for how long I had sat listening on the violet bank, when the cawing of the crows, resting in their homeward flight upon the tops of the neighbouring trees, roused me to a sense of time, and made me think the evening hours were drawing near. Mr Scott looked at his watch, and said it was more than two hours since he had left the road below. For a moment I was overcome with confusion to think how long a

time the plain woman had kept him talking to her alone; but I remembered I had really been waiting for Uncle Sherbrook. This was a great relief to my mind. I had quite forgotten my uncle!

"I think Uncle Sherbrook must have gone home by the front avenue, Mr Scott," said I, rising; "it is of no use our waiting for him any longer. I have the keys, so I can let you out of the lower gate. Perhaps," I exclaimed, "it is as well my uncle has not caught you here. He would be shocked to find you had jumped that gate without an Act of Parliament."

Mr Scott declared I had better not tell him; he said I should only upset his nerves. "And as I am off to London to-morrow, I cannot possibly upset them again for another two months at least; and then, instead of trespassing, I intend asking Mr Sherbrook for a key. I hear he likes being asked for a key."

"But what on earth do you want a key for?" I asked.

Mr Scott said the path was a short cut to Harefield.

"Harefield!" I exclaimed; "and what is the good of going to Harefield? There is nothing to be done when you get there but to go back again; and there is nothing to be bought in Harefield but an attorney or a red flannel dressing-gown with black spots on it."

Mr Scott said a retired cavalry sergeant, who was a first-rate fencer, had settled in the village—"and I seriously think of fencing with the fellow when I return to Mineham—just to keep my hand in!" He

said, by taking the train from Karton to Klipton, and from Klipton to Norris, you were landed just a mile from here; "and it is nothing of a walk at each end."

I suggested that his shorter way must surely be to go straight from Karton to Harefield.

"I should not get enough exercise that way," he replied. "I must have my exercise—I am never the thing without it! It is a nice little bit of ground from Norris to Harefield if you come through here. Such a fine view up there!" he exclaimed, turning and pointing up to the gate on the brow of the hill, where we had sat and talked so long. "It is the finest view at this side of the county."

I was glad to find he had a taste for scenery. I told him so. "You often walk up there?" he said, stopping, and looking me full in the face. I blushed under his eager, lively gaze, because I can never help blushing if I am looked at suddenly. "You often walk there?" he repeated; "now don't you?"

"No," said I. "I walk either on the front avenue or on the back. Aunt Jane does not like me to walk anywhere else. She only likes me to go where she goes, and she even dislikes Uncle Sherbrook to walk where she does not; and so does Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. When they hear where my uncle went to-day, I know they will both declare he has wet his feet."

I sighed as I said this. Mr Scott looked at me again and smiled.

We had now come to the last gate. I unlocked it,

and said good-bye; for from hence our paths diverged. But Mr Scott seemed to think I had dismissed him hurriedly. He leant on the open gate, and asked if I had forgotten how long a time it would be till we should meet again. I apologised for my hurry by the lateness of the hour, and turned to go. Seeing he still lingered, I came back. He said perhaps we should meet again sooner than we thought. He declared he should be dead-sick of London at the end of a month, and vowed that whether Lady Arabella stayed or left, he certainly would come to Mineham for a day or two at Whitsuntide.

"What pleasure can I find in London now?" said he. "I shall not have an earthly thing to do. I shall be bored to death! How can a man go into society when he has hardly money enough to buy gloves? Besides," he exclaimed, "I don't care for society, and I would not go into it if I could. People would cut me, now that my prospects are changed; and even if the men wanted to ask me to dinner, the ladies would not let them. By Jove, if a strong-minded father did manage to invite me, the mother would watch me as if I were a convict! Wherever I went, I should feel I was under strict police surveillance. I should have to watch every word I uttered. I should never feel at ease with any girl,—and I like to feel at ease with those I speak to."

He paused, and I thought he would now take leave, but he lingered on.

"Miss Thursley," he said, "how pleasantly at ease

we are together. With how little effort you and I can talk!" He smiled. "We talk for hours, and then wish to stay and talk still more."

He paused again. I thought he waited for an answer, yet something prevented me from speaking of the pleasure I had felt in meeting him. He looked at me, said an abrupt good-bye, and walked away. But he only went a few paces, and then returned to the gate on which I now was leaning, watching him and wondering at him.

"Pray excuse me, Miss Thursley," said he, as if much piqued—"pray excuse me for having tired you out."

"Tired me!" said I, puzzled and quite angry at the mere idea. "Do I look much bored?" And I added bitterly, "I have not a face which can express my thoughts: its heaviness belies the truth, and misleads those who look at me. Don't look at me!—never look at me!" And I exclaimed warmly, "You have not tired me, Mr Scott. I like to hear you speak, and I like to speak to you; for if you are at your ease with me, I am also strangely at my ease with you. I can talk to you as I think. I feel I am myself to-day."

Mr Scott laughed heartily, and asked who I felt I was when not myself?

"When I am buried low down in the family circle at Sherbrook," said I, "my identity gets smothered, and mixes up with other peoples'. Very often I feel I am only a bit of Aunt Jane!" And so saying, I

ran away, and never looked back till I got into the midst of the laurel grove. I was afraid to look back, for fear I should see Mr Scott still lingering at the gate and waiting for me to return. I ran most of the way home. The frightening-bell was ringing as I arrived. I tossed on my gown anyhow, and by a superhuman effort managed to be just in time for dinner.

CHAPTER XVII.

In due time Mrs Stewart cross-examined me, and found that Sophy had actually taken poor dear Mr Sherbrook for a walk on that horrid, damp path over the hill.

"Oh, Catherine!" said Aunt Jane, "then Edward must have wet his feet: he may get his death, and it will be all Sophy's fault!"

Sophy was not to be trusted with her uncle. This dogma—it became one—was joyfully accepted by Aunt Jane, but it originated with Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. The good woman was seriously displeased with me—far more so than Aunt Jane. When twenty-four hours had elapsed since "Edward" wet his feet, and my aunt found he could eat his breakfast, lunch, and dinner with appetite, she began to forget that Sophy had led her uncle's constitution into temptation. The continual bandaging of Catherine's ankle made Aunt Jane's memory less tenacious than usual of Sophy's sins. But the admirable Catherine was in no forgetful mood. I saw she could not bear the idea of Sophy's being alone with her uncle, and of Sophy's

getting round her uncle, and taking him where she liked, and talking nonsense to him. She wanted to know what we had talked about during our long walk. I fancy she suspected we had been making a will. She did not like to ask the question point-blank, but I saw it lay on the tip of her tongue. I enjoyed teasing her; so I was mysterious, and refused to repeat private conversations. This was silly imprudence on my part.

That very afternoon Mrs Stewart had a pain in her foot. She said too much carriage exercise shook the ankle. She declared it was quite enough for the injured bone to be shaken three times a-week, and announced her intention of sitting just outside the Corinthian porch for an hour or two every other afternoon.

"Then, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, poor dear Mr Sherbrook will have some one to walk with. It is rather hard on him to be abandoned by us every afternoon, and left with no one but Sophy; besides, Sophy is not to be trusted with her uncle."

"Indeed, Catherine," cried Aunt Jane—"indeed she is not! I will take care of Edward. I will see that Edward does not wet his feet. The front avenue is never wet, Catherine; it is always dry—for the rain runs off it, and does not soak into it, and Snipkins says it is something in the soil; so you never get your feet wet if you do not walk on the grass—and Edward never walks on the grass. It is only Sophy who walks on the grass, and even on the flower-beds,

though she says it is I who walk on the beds and on the mound in the garden; and you know, Catherine, I never did such a thing in my life—never! I would not do such a thing! I should think it wrong—quite wrong, Catherine!"

The other three days of the week, Mrs Stewart insisted on my driving in the close carriage with her and Aunt Jane. She discovered her ankle did not really want more than two cushions to prop it up on the back seat.

"My dear Mrs Sherbrook, you are spoiling me! I shall never be able to bear the heartless solitude of Riverbank again! But, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, now really two cushions are quite enough! Sophy must wear her tight jacket, and sit well in the corner, and hold her hands still, and keep her knees bent and her feet quiet, and then there will be plenty of room for all of us."

I obeyed the chief orderer, squeezed myself very small, and drove in that hateful close carriage with wonderfully good grace,—at least it was wonderful, considering how much I disliked snailing along backwards with my aunt, the tatting, and the two ladies' tongues.

I went thus driving with Mrs Stewart, and did not walk with my uncle, because I feared to excite overmuch the admirable Catherine's jealousy. I thought it wiser to soothe this growing irritation before it became a passion, mastering the woman's whole mind. I did not want Mrs Stewart to get me

on her nerves, as I well knew what it was for her to get a person on her nerves!

Mrs Stewart was amazed to see me come driving with so good a grace: she knew I hated that crawling carriage. No wonder she was surprised at my amiability; it was unnatural in me! for there I sat pinched into nothing, tatted at unceasingly, and seemingly silent for two hours at a stretch, and yet in very good-humour all the time! Mrs Stewart's piercing gaze could make nothing of me. At last I really think my amiability alarmed her; I think she feared there was a trick in it.

"Why, there is Sophy!" cried Aunt Jane, more than once — "oh, Catherine, there is Sophy smiling to herself, and her lips are moving!" These last words would catch my ear and give me an unwelcome start in the midst of some pleasant conversation; for I was only seemingly silent: I was really talking all the time, and I hated to be interrupted and looked at and noticed. I liked to talk on quietly in security and peace, for now I always had a pleasant companion by my side. This was the secret of my unnatural amiability. No matter where I went or who went with me, the companion came too, and stayed with me, and never left me.

Life had changed for me since that bright spring day when I had met David Scott on the path over the hill. He had refreshed my wearied mind, so I liked to think he was always talking to me and I to him. It was no effort to imagine him beside me, for his voice was ever in my ear. I could hear his voice, and

hear him say, "I should like to meet you and speak to you every day of my life, until I bored you and you would listen to me no longer." And then again, "How pleasantly at ease we are together! We talk for hours, and then wish to stay and talk still more." Ah yes! how pleasantly at ease we are together! that is the secret of all agreeable conversation. No stifling of nature, no striving strain, no fear in that perfect ease! We give to the kindred sympathetic mind, the half-formed thought just opening in our own, and we give in confidence of perfect understanding.

For some years I had felt as if I were living hopelessly smothered up in wet blankets. I am sure the turn of Aunt Jane's mind and the ramble of her sentences would be a wet blanket to any sort of imagination. It was an effort to converse with her,—an effort to converse with every one I knew, except one man—only and except one man! I told myself this was the sole reason I chose that man's quick-sighted, lively mind as my companion when I wished to enliven my solitude with pleasant discourse.

Each morning I now walked with David Scott on the back avenue in imaginary conversation. The morning's walk ceased to depress my spirits, since I no longer walked alone with Aunt Jane. I had my aunt at only one side of me; I had my imagination at the other, and I let it lead me where it would.

I had spent nearly three weeks living thus pleasantly with my imagination beside me, when my aunt nearly killed me one morning at breakfast. "Sophy,

Sophy!" she cried out, "Snipkins tells me, the day you took your uncle for a walk on that dreadful damp path over the hill, you met Mr David Scott and talked with him for a long time. It was the day Edward wet his feet so dreadfully! And Snipkins says you talked with Mr Scott for two whole hours; and it was Harriet's brother Sam told Snipkins; and it was Tom Bolster, Jack Jones's chief man, told Sam; and Tom saw you from the road below. And, Sophy, you never told me you met Mr Scott; and I never knew you were in the habit of walking alone, and meeting young gentlemen, and talking to them. You ought only to have bowed to Mr Scott, and you ought to have walked on; and you ought not to have spoken to him, as your uncle had left you, and you had neither Catherine nor me to talk for you. And if you did speak to him, you ought to have told me the very instant you came home. Sophy, why did you never tell me you met him?"

I blushed: what pain it is to blush when you know your blush invents a lying tale and gives suspicion of what does not exist! Mrs Stewart's eye was upon me; even Uncle Sherbrook laid down his blue-buggle and looked at me curiously. Was it a wonder that I blushed?

"Why did you not tell me?" repeated Aunt Jane. Oh cruelty of tactless people!—cruelty of near relations, who have a right to ask you every question before all the world—is there any cruelty surpassing yours?

"Sophy, Sophy," asked my aunt again, "why did you not tell me you met him?"

"I . . . I . . . I could not tell you, Aunt Jane," said I.

"By the by, Mrs Sherbrook," cried Mrs Stewart, "Lady Runaway has sent me her Society's most interesting report on the Christianising Influences of the Russian Arms in Turkestan. You shall hear what the report says. Now, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, here is something that will interest you."

Mrs Stewart astounded me. My heart filled with gratitude towards her, and I immediately gave five shillings to her Christian Cossack—I, who had never given a penny to her postmen or her dogs, to her blacks, her Turks, or even to her French infidels.

I was intensely provoked with myself for not having told Aunt Jane, the instant I came home that day, how I had met Mr Scott, and how I had talked with him. But what I said to my aunt was only too true. I could not tell her. I had tried several times. I had carried her transitions to the very point, and my heart had failed me. I could not bring myself to tell her I had met him. I could not do so, because instinct revealed to me that I should raise an idea in that mind which I would hate to see—a detestable idea, which would destroy the ease I felt with David Scott, which would debase the beauty of those hours we had spent together, agitating the happiness, disturbing the holy calm, of that fair day,—a day I liked to think upon!—a day I had thought of till its memory was idealised within my soul. The cuckoo's

note, the warble of the birds, the soft air breathing over the far-reaching land, the rapture of those distant voices, had left a hallowed joy in my heart which shrank from desecration. I feared Aunt Jane's remarks like sacrilege.

I knew my aunt to be possessed, as with an evil spirit, of the detestable notion that no unmarried lady or gentleman ever talked for five minutes together without there being some sort of flirtation between them. Preposterous, and, worst of all, most vulgarising idea! This mania alarmed me. I should not have dared to speak to any gentleman in Aunt Jane's presence, for I should have known exactly what was passing in her mind. Flirtation shocked her! Nothing is so indelicate as over-delicacy. I felt strongly on this point. It is all very well that Adonis should be supposed to fall in love with Venus at first sight. The thing is just possible, so it is not altogether laughable; but is it not laughable, monstrous, and painfully indelicate, that an agreeable man cannot talk for an hour or so to a plain woman without severely proper-minded relations imagining he is paying her decided attention, and taking fright accordingly?

Can anybody wonder that I should thus nervously have dreaded the sacrilege I knew would sully the charm and destroy the ideality of that constant companionship which I so loved?

Fear of this sacrilege drove me to walk on the back avenue again, as of old, with Aunt Jane at both sides of me. Her transitions kept me in a nervous fever;

she was always touching on the subject I wished her to avoid. I had to watch her as a cat does a mouse.

Just before Whitsuntide an event occurred. Uncle Sherbrook got a letter from Mr David Scott begging, as a great favour, to be allowed the right of trespassing on the path over the hill. Uncle Sherbrook was gravely delighted. He immediately sent a key, "trusting to Mr Scott's honour as a gentleman that the gates would never be left unlocked." Aunt Jane told me he used these words, and she knew, as she assisted in the study at the writing of Uncle Sherbrook's answer.

Mrs Stewart heard Mr Scott was coming down to Mineham the following week for two days.

My spirit sank. I knew this piece of news and Uncle Sherbrook's letter would swamp every thing and person in my aunt's mind except David Scott, and make her transitions quite unmanageable. Conceive, then, my delight at hearing Mrs Stewart exclaim, "My dear Mrs Sherbrook, old Dan is overeating himself, and getting too fat on your excellent fare. He will soon be good for nothing; so I really must insist on his drawing me up and down the back avenue every morning for an hour by your side. There is an old bath-chair in the coachhouse."

My aunt's skirts and the bath-chair quite filled up the higher level of the avenue, and that was the only part of the road Aunt Jane knew to be really dry. The lower sides she considered dangerously damp; and I must do her the justice to say she would not have

permitted any one, not even her mortal enemy, to wet his feet in the gutter. Not that Aunt Jane let me stay at home! To her mind, the punctual morning walk was a duty which humanity owed its constitution. She never ceased lamenting that "Edward" would sit in his study till after luncheon. "Poor dear Edward! he seriously neglects his health, Catherine; and he is like you, Sophy—he does not take my advice." I was not permitted to do my duty towards my constitution by roaming where I liked, but I was allowed to walk a little behind Aunt Jane and her excellent Catherine, there not being room for the three of us in line.

I could then walk alone!—oh great delight!—alone with my imagination, where Aunt Jane had been; with the pleasant companion at each side of me! I went back to our interrupted communion with rapturous joy—the joy of the prisoner escaped from the jailer's questioning eye and tongue—the joy of the uncaged bird singing because there is an inspiration to sing in the open air. A sort of inspiration, bringing me a flow of thoughts and words to speak them as I felt them, came over me. The morning walk was all too short. The hour ended when it scarcely seemed to have begun.

I walked four mornings thus happily in never-ceasing delightful discourse. The fifth day it poured rain, so the best of women lay on the sofa, and my aunt paced the drawing-room, doing her duty to her constitution and talking to her Catherine at the same time.

"Sophy" took up a book. This was high treason! so, for the sake of peace, I consented to walk up and down the room like Aunt Jane: by judiciously following exactly in her track, I managed she should run into me and tumble when she turned. After this shocking catastrophe, Sophy was told to sit quite out of the way in a distant corner of the room, but she was on no account to read! Reading in the drawing-room, and not listening when your elders were talking, was bad manners.

The moment I found myself exiled to a nice quiet nook, my kind friend came to me and sat beside me. Time passed agreeably; and so interested did I become in our pleasant conversation, that I never heard George open the door or announce a visitor. It is true I sat at a distance from the door, and with my back to it, seemingly gazing out of a window.

Of a sudden a voice struck my heart and made it leap with joy. I turned and saw Mr Scott standing beside Mrs Stewart's sofa. I rose in haste and went with outstretched hand towards him. Perhaps my sudden joy was too great, like great heat, which makes even what is warm feel cold; for when I met him, he seemed cold to me. It was from his own near presence that his voice had roused me, calling me from the imaginary to the real, the living man; and yet I found the real man cold—more dead to me than the friend of my imagination. Oh joy driven back into the heart, what a pain you are! I felt—or thought I felt—that Mr Scott and I were almost strangers. The

shock took from me the power of speech. When he spoke to me, my answer died upon my lips, and Aunt Jane and Mrs Stewart answered for me. I am sure I should quickly have recovered my presence of mind, only Mrs Stewart never took her eye off me, and Aunt Jane looked at me and looked at Mr Scott with the severe expression of a keen-sighted woman, who clearly perceives what even acute minds may not see, and who, moreover, is scandalised by the mere ghost of flirtation. A gentleman should never speak to a young lady until he has proposed to her father or mother, or to her aunt or uncle: this was the infallible dogma of the longest upper lip in Europe!

The look in Aunt Jane's face was alone enough to strike me dumb; besides, I never could talk before her and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. I never care to speak, indeed I never can speak, unless I can talk quite naturally, and take my little fling as I go along. And I never could do this in the presence of these two admirable, fault-finding ladies. Aunt Jane would harp on for weeks, and most likely weep over some stray expression which had come into my head and gone out of it at the same moment.

So Aunt Jane and Mrs Stewart had the conversation all to themselves. The admirable Catherine became quite lively, though Mr Scott seemed to be in anything but an agreeable mood. I could see Aunt Jane bored him, and when bored he does not conceal the fact very successfully. He paid a short visit. On rising to bid good-bye, he said, "Mrs Sherbrook, I am

forgetting the chief object of my early call. I came to thank Mr Sherbrook for his kindness about that key. Tell him I will not leave the gates open; tell him he has my word of honour for it."

"I think," remarked Aunt Jane, "you had better have that key oiled before you use it, Mr Scott, for I daresay it is very rusty. Edward has a great many of those keys in the study, because he thought a great many people living in the neighbourhood would apply for them when the lawsuit about the right-of-way ended in his favour; but hardly anybody wanted them, so they have grown rather rusty, and Edward won't let the servants clean them, because, you see, he is afraid they might give them away to tramps and bad characters, and to all sorts of people, though my servants never would do such a thing—they are far too respectable! but Edward has a great horror of having crowds of people walking through the place, though I tell him no sensible person would ever wish to walk on that path; it is so very damp! really quite dangerous! and the last time Edward walked there he wet his feet. By the by, you met Sophy that last——"

I made a great effort, and wrested Aunt Jane's transition from her. "Mr Scott," I said, "it is just one o'clock; surely you could stay to luncheon?"

My aunt's face was not to be described, but the impossibility of asking any one to lunch without premeditation and Snipkins's previous consent, was clearly written there. Mr Scott saw how matters stood, and declared he could not possibly stay a mo-

ment longer; his time was not his own; he had come down to Dullshire on some business of Lady Arabella's: so he said good-bye, and shook hands. My hand trembled when it touched his.

"Mrs Sherbrook," he exclaimed, returning as with an after-thought—"Mrs Sherbrook," he said, speaking to Aunt Jane, but looking at me, "pray tell Mr Sherbrook I hope to use that new key to-morrow. Business takes me to Harefield. I will go by train in the morning, but I will exercise my right to trespass in the afternoon."

"Oh, Mr Scott, Mr Scott!" cried Aunt Jane, "that damp path will be so dreadfully wet to-morrow! Oh, Mr Scott! you will catch your death of cold! and most likely it will rain to-morrow, just as it is raining to-day."

"No, no, Mrs Sherbrook," he replied; "it will not rain to-morrow. It will be fine." He looked at me again, and said slowly, "I wish it to be fine to-morrow." He paused, then added, "And I am a lucky man in weather, although lucky in nothing else! By Jove, lucky in nothing else!" And then he said, in the voice which marked his words, no matter what they were, upon my memory, "But perhaps my luck may turn some day; perhaps . . . to-morrow!"

I could not bear his steady gaze; I looked away.

My aunt exclaimed, "Oh, Mr Scott! don't think you will be lucky and live and not get consumption if you go deliberately wetting your feet, for at your age you will fall into consumption and die of a bad

cold. Any man may die of consumption till he is past thirty, and I know you are not thirty yet. And now, Mr Scott, I will tell you what to do; come round by the front avenue, and then go straight on, and I will tell William Snipkins to let you out by the back-avenue gate. Damp places are so very dangerous, especially in the afternoon. They are quite poisonous at sunset, and they are full of miasma, and malaria, and ague, and fever, and sore throats, and dreadful colds of every kind and description; and I am never out at sunset, Mr Scott—never! not even walking on the front avenue, though the front avenue is always perfectly dry, for there is something peculiar in the soil."

"You are a wise woman, Mrs Sherbrook," said Mr Scott, with surprising gravity—"very wise! I will take your advice, and not be out at sunset."

I felt his speaking eye again upon me, and looked up. "I mean," he said, "to walk over that dangerous path to-morrow about three o'clock; but not later! Do not be alarmed, Mrs Sherbrook!"—and he repeated, still looking at me, "Not later!" So saying, he went away, but in going he turned, looked back at me, and smiled. As if by magic, I forgot all painful doubts and fears, and felt once more he was no stranger to me, but a friend with whom I was at ease.

I became very angry with myself for having lost my nerve, and voice, and power of speech in his presence. But my anger soon ceased to chide me, and spent itself upon Aunt Jane and Mrs Stewart. If

they had not been by, thought I, I should have met him and talked to him quite naturally. I know I should. I felt it was their presence paralysed my courage and my tongue, and not his fancied coldness—a coldness which did not exist! He was not cold to me! So I threw the blame of my confusion upon others, and looked forward in hopeful joy to the morrow—when I will go, thought I, to meet him on the path over the hill, and being alone, I shall be myself again, and he will be at ease with me, and I with him.

The idea of not going to meet him never entered my head. Had he not said to me as clearly as he could, that he would await me next day at three o'clock? Then, and no later; so that I knew the exact time he would be there, and I could not pretend to ignore it. When he had named the hour of our meeting, I had felt as if he were giving me a hope in life.

I liked to dwell upon the morrow. I longed to think of it unceasingly till I should forget the annoyance of to-day. But I could not. I dared not let my imagination wander far. I had to watch Aunt Jane carefully, and I spent the whole afternoon and evening in nervous dread of what she might say before my uncle and "Catherine." I was beginning to fear Aunt Jane even more than Mrs Stewart, for this latter incomprehensible woman kept entirely to the Cossacks, and never once alluded to Mr Scott's visit. In his presence, it is true, she had fixed that dreadful eye of hers upon me, but when he went away she had never

looked at me again. She left me in peace, and amazed me! I was grateful to her; and then my gratitude surprised me.

I wearily watched Aunt Jane's transitions until bedtime. That night I lay awake for hours: my eyes were wide open, and I lay dreaming, if it can be called dreaming to see and hear and realise vividly with a most wakeful imagination. In those night-hours I realised the morrow just as if the sun were up and shining. I walked by the path over the hill; passing the second gate, I went on through the wood, and I saw David Scott coming towards me. I felt no shyness, but met him gladly; and he was kind, not cold to me. I liked to linger over this our pleasant meeting. I liked to feel his presence, and to see the whole scene clearly before my eyes. I could not tire of the sight! I loved to dwell upon it, as we love to dwell upon the happy hours of life. I waited amidst the peaceful woods, breathing their calm delight, and then I saw him with vivid clearness come towards me. I beheld him in unabashed joy; and again and again I dwelt upon our pleasant meeting.

I cannot say if I really slept at all that night, or if, having slept, I awoke next morning. Sleeping or waking, it now seems to me I still was dreaming. I lay under a spell: no fears troubled me, and uncommon events seemed natural, predestined. They did not even astonish me. I was not a bit surprised at breakfast to hear Mrs Stewart arrange that she and Aunt Jane and Uncle Sherbrook should drive to Votlingham

in the afternoon, starting punctually at a quarter past two. Mrs Stewart said the glass was rising. When the horses had already been out twice in the week, and two ladies wanted to drive twelve miles on the top of all this previous exercise, it required but little diplomacy to make Uncle Sherbrook take a seat on the box, in order to keep a strict eye on the hills. And then Votlingham was the one place my uncle could easily be tempted to visit, because he bought his pens in Votlingham—particular pens, only to be found at one particular shop! And pens were to him what reels of cotton were to Aunt Jane—he let no one choose them but himself.

Any other day of my life, the good luck which was to leave "Sophy" at home by herself would have filled me with a burst of joyful amazement. But this day I heard the good news unmoved, as if I had been told it beforehand. Had I not known that I should walk alone this day? I had somehow known it long ago. So certain did I feel of it, that I had never even thought how it might come to pass. I feared no obstacle thrust across my path, preventing the meeting, which I believed in, because I saw it taking place before my eyes. No matter where I went, I gazed upon the woodland scene, feeling I never could gaze enough. I gazed all the morning as I walked on the back avenue, and thought of the happy moment an hour or two must now bring forth.

The carriage started, and I took the keys and set off, walking slowly towards the path over the hill. There

was time. Besides, if I had started an hour too late, in my dream-like state I should not have hurried. The scene I had so long dwelt upon had never varied. It was always I who, arriving first, waited in the wood till he came towards me. I knew the very tree where I must wait for him. I walked in quiet composure, dream-engrossed, noting nothing.

I unlocked and locked the gates mechanically. I did not stop to look upon the far-reaching country or the distant hills. I was blind till I came to the tree where I should await him. How well I knew the old beech's blasted stump! It stood apart, with a patch of bare earth between it and the woodland path. There was a thick tangle of brushwood at a little distance behind the big tree, but still on the same raised ground.

I leant against the beech: being on a knoll, the path seemed to dive away from me, and to dive by slow degrees deeper and deeper, until it reached what was called the upper Harefield gate. There was no lodge to this gate; it was opened by one of the right-of-way keys. From where I stood I had a view through the wood over the whole length of the path, and I could see the gate at either end—the upper Harefield gate, and the meadow-gate I had just come through.

I looked towards Harefield. I waited for him. Calm and patient I waited, not in hope, but in perfect trust. I knew he would come. I felt his near presence: it did not agitate me to feel as if he were already by my side. I looked, and in the far distance I saw him.

He was walking towards me through the sunlit woods, just as I had seen him in my waking dreams. There was no jarring difference in the scene suddenly to destroy illusion; and yet, from the moment I beheld him, the spell which bound me was broken. It was the cold stranger I seemed to see, and not the warm, the sympathetic friend. I dreaded the cold stranger. I feared again to lose my nerve and voice, ay, and even my senses, in his presence. As he drew nearer, my heart began to beat, and it beat so loudly that a panic seized me. I rushed from where I had been standing and hid myself in the tangled brushwood close by.

The beech-tree shut out the view towards Harefield from my hiding-place, so I could only see that bit of the path which leads to the meadow-gate. David Scott was lost to sight. Every moment I thought to see him stand beside the old tree; but he was a long, long time in coming! I thought he would never come!

At last I heard approaching footsteps. I had listened for them; yet when I heard them, I started as if the sound were strange and unexpected. The footsteps drew still nearer. I held my breath, for I knew they would stop at the old beech-tree; but they did not stop. I could not believe my ears. I looked, and saw that David Scott had indeed passed on—passed on without an instant's hesitation! The cold stranger had ruthlessly passed on!

I felt there was a gulf between us. Our pleasant meeting by the beech-tree, which I had dwelt upon

till I believed in its reality, had never, then, been seen by him! What sympathy had he with me, if the one thought of my mind had never been the thought of his? I drew my dress more closely round me, and hid myself deeper in the brushwood. I feared intensely that he might see me and return. I now hated the idea of meeting him. His coldness, I thought, would kill me!

Oh sudden rush of rapturous joy! I saw him stop and lean upon the gate where he and I had met before. He waited, then, for me, and thought to see me as I had seen him, coming up through the meadow from the land of far-off voices! He looked towards the distant hills as I had looked, and looking, dreamt that happy, holy day—the day I never could forget!

"Oh, I will go and meet him now!" cried I; "it is for me that he is waiting!" He turned as if he heard a sound. He looked towards my hiding-place; and I —fool that I was!—I became a coward again. I had not the courage to step out before his eyes, and show him I was hiding like a thief, watching him, dogging his steps in secret. I shrank, too, from the questions he would ask. Why had I hidden from him at all? Could I say I had come to meet him, and had waited for him? Could I tell how a panic had seized me at the first sight of him, making my heart beat, and my nerve fail me? I felt I could not tell the truth; and then what else could I tell him? Would not a lie dry up my tongue, and make me speechless in

his presence? I knew I might have lied to all the world before I could have lied to him. I knew that at his word my lips would speak the whole most strange, perplexing truth.

So I lay deeply hidden in the protecting brushwood. The fresh green leaves were like good friends to me, covering from sight my tortured heart; for it was torn and dragged, between the torture of longing to break forth and go to him, and the torture of fearing to go.

David Scott waited—still waited on for me! The time seemed endless to me. He may only have waited some ten minutes, or he may have waited a long hour. At last he climbed the gate, and went slowly away.

When he was quite lost to sight, I felt as if I should never see him again on earth. An agony of remorse took hold of me. He had been there almost beside me, and he had waited for me—he had told me he would wait, and I knew he would! Yet I had shrunk away from him, and had not gone to him; and now, thought I, he will never, never come again! Oh the pain of that thought! I hated myself. I despised and loathed my cowardly self.

Bursting from my prison, I rushed onwards to try and overtake him before he had gone too far. The craving to meet him, to speak to him, if only one word, mastered every other feeling in my soul. My regret was intolerable. The passion of it dimmed my eyes with scalding tears. A burning tear fell upon my hand and startled me. I stopped in my

headlong haste. I gazed and wondered. I am not given to tears. There was, then, a reality about this grief of mine, which had no dream in it! It was a real tear, so it frightened me. What was this passion, like the passions of childhood, which could make me weep? I tried to gather my senses together, for they were quite distraught. I tried to reason on this strange passion of remorseful regret, and then on those other feelings which rushed upon me, overwhelming me, and for which I found no name. I could not understand this strange confusion of the soul and brain. But in trying to unravel it, a thought struck me—a terrifying thought! I spurned it from me, but it would come back to me again and yet again! It took possession of me, and was in my heart, and on my conscience, and before my eyes, till I could see nothing else in all the world but it, and conceive no other thought—as if it were so all-devouring, that where it lived, no other thought could live.

A great fear had seized me, and the pain as of a great shame. I feared, then knew, I loved this man. This was the thought which filled my heart and mind and soul, and stood before my eyes, staring at me, and reproaching me with madness and with shame.

I buried my face in my hands. The sun was too bright for my burning cheeks — it lighted up my shame. I longed for night to cover me — for a darkness so thick that it might hide my thought even from myself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WELL, Sophy," said the admirable Catherine, in her cheerfully hard, "happy release" tone of voice—"well, Sophy, I hope you had a pleasant walk yesterday afternoon? and a pleasant meeting with Mr David Scott?"

"I did not meet him!" cried I, fiercely; "I did not! I tell you I did not!" My voice trembled with passion and fear. The best of women forgot her ankle in sheer amazement, and started off the sofa, dropping her tatting, and letting her bag fall to the ground: the cotton, the tracts, and the collecting-cards littered the floor. I left the room, and let her pick up the rubbish herself.

Thank heaven, Aunt Jane was not by at the time! As yet, she had asked me no disagreeable questions, because she had no suspicions—she thought I had walked alone on the front avenue. One of the race of front-lodge Snipkins had told her so, or rather, told the invaluable Sarah, who told her. It had happened, when the truth had stood revealed to my sight, like an angel with a flaming sword barring

the path which would have led me to David Scott had I rushed onwards, that I had turned and gone home another way. There was a grass road leading from the upper Harefield gate to the front avenue.

I was relieved beyond measure to find Aunt Jane imagined I had walked up and down that hateful front avenue, expecting, as I did, to undergo a cross-examination about the exact place where I had wet my feet. But this sense of relief was short-lived: it was a moment's happiness doomed to die quickly, and be followed by a torturing fear. Now that I had a thought to hide from every eye and tongue, life became a fear, and little else but a fear, to me. When Aunt Jane spoke to me suddenly, I would start as if I thought she had discovered my secret, and were going to tell me so, and to talk of it aloud, not understanding it was a sacred agony to me.

Mrs Stewart's presence also became a nervous terror to me. I dared not raise my face to hers; for when I met her eye, that eye saw my secret. I never was made to keep a secret! I felt I could not hide it; every one who spoke to me suspected it. How I feared to hear David Scott's name mentioned! I schooled myself to hear it unmoved; yet I trembled each morning when the post-bag was opened in public at the breakfast-table, knowing how a letter from Lady Arabella would make that name a subject of discussion. I always sat with my back to the light, like Aunt Jane's Jesuit, fearing that name would make me colour, and betray myself. It unnerves

you to feel you dare not trust your friend; yet what is that to feeling you can put no faith in yourself, but may at any moment turn traitor to yourself? I had no longer any confidence in my strength and nerve, so my secret became a sleepless dread. I felt intensely what the shame of its betrayal would be to me. A pretty woman, accustomed almost from childhood to love and to be loved, and to think she flatters whoever she is in love with, shows her feelings quite naturally, because there is no disgrace for her in loving, when it is most likely, even certain, she must be loved in return. Such a happy fairy can have no conception of the pain, the regretful sorrow, and the shame which fill, as with an agony, the heart of the poor, plain, unattractive creature who, quite by accident, without thinking of love, has fallen in love. Had I foreseen the misfortune, it could never have happened to me. When, pining in my solitude of soul, I entertained the pleasant companion, it was a kind friend in my sore need and no lover who came to me. The idea of my ever loving any one had naturally never struck me, because I was aware no one could love me. Ugly, heavy, unattractive as I am, I knew my love was an insult to a man like David Scott.

When the thought I hated stood staring at me, there was no hope in it—not one moment's illusion! From the first I was sure, quite sure, David Scott had waited for me at the gate, solely to talk about himself—about his disappointment in love and life.

He knew I would listen to him; perhaps no one else would. I did not deceive myself with the delusion that his waiting for me was a sign of any other feeling. It was not my vanity, but my imagination, which had gone mad. I now thought with horror of what would have happened had I broken forth to meet him that time in the wood. I looked upon the remorse I suffered when he went away as upon the ecstasy of insanity.

I saw our meeting as it would have been. I felt he would have quickly known my love. I saw his look of scorn. I felt his scorn, and I writhed beneath it: it lashed my pride with shame as with a whip, insulting, degrading its dignity. I turned away from such a sight as this, then turned to look at it, at him again. I never could bear the pain of shame, not even as a child; yet I dwelt upon this scene, and could not tear my thoughts away.

"Am I mad?" cried I, at last arousing myself from this nightmare—"am I mad, that I should like to dwell upon this humbling of my pride, this scorning of my love, better than not to think of that man, or not to see him at all?" I strove with my whole might not to think of him. I fled from the absorbing thought as from the greatest enemy I had on earth. Night and day, I made an effort not to think of him or see him; but never for a moment could I forget I was making this great effort.

Consider, all ye who must despise me—oh, consider, and have pity, when you think what the pleasant com-

panion was to me! Consider the enchantment of agreeability and wit to one whom everybody takes for granted is created expressly to be bored! Plain girls, hidden behind some aunt, or in the far-distant background of a family, have a fearful temptation towards love—far greater than the pretty ones; for the pretty find some satisfaction in life, and the plain too often find none. Yet is there no excuse made on earth for the plain woman's unreturned love. I knew neither man nor woman would excuse me. I alone excused myself. I laid the blame of this love, born in my heart unknown to me, on the life I was forced to lead.

The loneliness of this life, its heart starvation, its mental pain, did plead for me powerfully with my own conscience. But oh! thought I, in this world there is no pity for the bitter pain of the mind, which in starving misery clutches at its own wild inventions as at bread. Physically, mentally imprisoned, I had craved for something that would satisfy in life. I clearly saw how the life the Sherbrooks had invented was fearfully well suited to drive the imagination mad; and the imagination is so delicate, so sensitive a part of us, that it may easily be driven mad. While the heat of youth still warms our blood, the imagination will not give up the ghost and die, but will live to rule and ruin us, if we dare to bind it down and starve it in some narrow cell. Once driven to madness, it can and will break all bonds of reason and of sense, for

it is not the mere dead wooden doll elderly and "awakened" men and women like to think it.

"A curse, then, be on those," I cried, "who forget their youth!—who think the energy of a life not yet grown old, unnatural, and who starve the affections, and forbid the heart and mind that satisfaction which made their own youth a joy and not a sorrow to themselves!"

No sooner did I hear these words of mine, spoken aloud to myself in anger, than I was sorry I had cursed the poor old Sherbrooks. They had not meant to make my life unhappy or to drive me to madness. They had only been unsympathetic and very blind; and blindness is not a sin in those who have no eyes—who are born not to see, being sent into the world without the faculty of perception. My heart smote me, and I was glad no one heard my words but myself, for they were cruel and unjust. It was remorse and bitter disquietude of soul, and a sort of contradictory repentance searching for an excuse, which drew the curse from me. At times I was frightened by the change I felt irritating despair and fear were working in me. I felt myself growing cruel and fierce, and to like hatred better than love.

It was summer, and the days were fine; the leaves were on the trees, the sky was blue, and the very air was such it should have breathed upon my heart and softened it. Yet I, to whom beauty is a great delight, found no joy, no peace, in the calm loveliness of earth and sky. There seemed to be no more peace for me in life. How could there be peace? I lived with the

hourly dread beside me, where the pleasant companion had been: fear had taken its place, but even fear could not fill it. I felt that absence at every step I took.

Mrs Stewart had soon tired of the back avenue. I walked there again each morning, alone with Aunt Jane. Mrs Stewart was allowed to stay indoors until after luncheon—"because, Sophy, you know," said Aunt Jane, "Catherine is occupied in a good work." The good woman was said to be "dressing up" for publication the reports of the societies whose paid secretary she was. How I wished I might have been allowed to stay at home, under any pretence whatever! I should willingly have "dressed up" blacks and whites from sinners into saints, and for nothing! Any occupation is better than none; and the turning of sinners into saints is by no means hard work, if you have once got the knack of the thing, and learnt the peculiar language.

Besides embellishing and sanctifying reports, Mrs Stewart wrote innumerable letters. The charitable societies paid the postage of the official but not always of the private letters. The admirable Catherine rarely had stamps of her own, so she "borrowed" Aunt Jane's.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart kept up some sort of correspondence with every person "worth knowing" she had ever been introduced to, even casually, during the course of her energetic existence. She constantly wrote to Jumping Georgy. There was nothing surprising in this. She may have been kindly recom-

mending cooks to Lady Tutterton, and to all Lady Tutterton's friends: she often said Sir Horace Tutterton might be very useful some day to poor dear Gordon-Sherbrook, if poor dear Gordon-Sherbrook stayed in the army. The astonishing part of the matter was, that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone sometimes answered these letters. People did not invariably answer Mrs Stewart's letters.

Jumping Georgy wrote abruptly, in the most characteristic style imaginable. Letters, which are no test of an Englishman's mind or nature, are, in nine cases out of ten, a very fair test of an Englishwoman's. The Drill-sergeant's letters were as short and peremptory as her manner, and there was a great deal of high-stepping action in her handwriting, and all from right to left. Mrs Stewart has often told me that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has the most intense contempt for any lady who writes what is called a pleasant letter. She thinks all letters ought to be on business of one sort or another, and keep strictly to the point. The Drill-sergeant takes great pride in her own military invoices, where none of the items are joined together, but jump forwards, like sharpshooters, each with an independent jerk of its own. Those who know her best, say she considers her own style a model of the right sort of style—of the only sort suited to a lady of position, sense, and action.

One day in the beginning of July, Mrs Stewart gave me a letter she had received from Jumping Georgy, and told me to read it. I read—

"DEAR MRS SHERBROOK-STEWART,—My mother does not want a cook. Lady Furley wants a kitchen-maid. Louisa Clarcke is engaged to Fred Tankney. He can make a good settlement. We are all perfectly satisfied. Lady Furley wants the kitchen-maid next week. I direct this to Sherbrook Hall.—Very sincerely yours, GEO. RIGARDY-WRENSTONE.

"P.S.—Sorry your ankle is no better."

Mrs Stewart watched me while I read. Her eye met mine, and killed the mad joy which had rushed into my heart unawares when I saw and realised that Louisa Clarcke was engaged to be married, and not to David Scott. The pang of joy passed like sudden frenzy; and then I persuaded myself I sorely regretted David Scott was not the man to whom Louisa was engaged, though I thought Louisa unworthy of him. I fancied that I longed for some insurmountable barrier to be placed between us, so as to prevent others from suspecting my love. I told myself, if he were once engaged, watchful suspicion would cease, and the eyes which knew me so well that they saw and recognised every little change of my countenance, would look at me no more. Oh the pain of living in a very narrow circle, face to face with tactless observation all the long hours of endless days! Who has not felt this wearying pain can hardly imagine it.

At last the dreaded time arrived when people left London and came down to the country.

Mrs Stewart heard the Scotts were at Mineham. "I declare, Mrs Sherbrook," she exclaimed one morning at breakfast, "there is a letter for you from Lady Arabella. Mr Sherbrook has just taken it out of the post-bag."

While Aunt Jane was carefully cutting open the top of the envelope, she wondered if Lady Arabella wrote to say she and Mr Scott would call to-day, "or perhaps to-morrow, or the next day. But what are you looking at, Sophy?" she cried. "What do you see out of that window? Catherine, what is Sophy looking at? I can see nobody walking on the grass." My back was turned to the admirable Catherine's eye, and yet I knew it was fixed upon me. Her voice laughed hardly as she said, "Sophy is always gazing at some one, Mrs Sherbrook, whom neither you nor I can see. Sophy has her own secret, and she keeps it to herself."

I was sitting next my uncle, and I saw he heard Mrs Stewart's words. He raised his eyes from the post-bag and looked at me intently, to my utter confusion. Fortunately, Lady Arabella's envelope was open, and Aunt Jane had hastily begun to read the letter while her Catherine was still speaking.

"Oh, Catherine, Catherine!" she exclaimed, joyfully, "here is an invitation for you, and me, and Sophy, to go to Mineham, and to stay there three days. And, only fancy! Lady Arabella asks Sophy twice over, at the beginning and at the end of her letter, though she only asks you once!"

"Once is enough," replied Mrs Stewart. "I will certainly go to Mineham, and so will you, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, and so will Sophy. Sophy must come, and shall come."

This was said in the most decided rasp of that decided voice. Had Mrs Stewart spoken more gently, she might not have roused my mean spirit to action; but that voice betrayed her determination to have her will, not mine, obeyed, and so stung even the wretched coward within me, and drove it to fight with her, and win the day while there was time.

"Mrs Stewart," I said, "no power on earth shall make me go to Mineham against my will; and it is against my will to go there." I rose from table, and, standing beside my uncle, I laid my hand upon his shoulder. I remembered how I had once leant on his strong arm in the weakness of a great sorrow. "Mrs Stewart," I said, "Uncle Sherbrook will protect me from your tyranny; I know he will. He has always been a strong-hearted friend to me in trouble."

"Sophy," said my uncle, gravely,—Aunt Jane looked positively awestruck when he spoke,—"Sophy, I am glad you appeal to me for protection. As I am aware you are not deficient in mental capacity, I feel justified in believing that your disinclination to accept Lady Arabella's invitation comes from some good reason, better known to yourself than to Mrs Stewart. Mrs Stewart and your Aunt Jane will go to Mineham, while you and I, Sophy, will remain comfortably at home."

The clever Catherine gave my uncle no answer, but she looked alarmingly angry. It took Aunt Jane some little time to recover from the silent awe into which a speech from "Edward" invariably threw her. Her silence lasted rather longer than usual. I imagined she could not understand why Sophy had spoken to her uncle, or why her uncle had spoken to Catherine. I thought she looked somewhat red, and jealous too. At length she exclaimed—"I must say, Edward, I do wonder you can think Sophy has any mental capacity at all, because I think her the least clever person I ever knew; and indeed I never like her to stay at home alone with you, because when I am away she sits in the study talking nonsense to you, and always makes you wet your feet besides, or do something dangerous and dreadful! But, Catherine, if Sophy says she will not go to Mineham, you may be quite sure she won't, because Sophy always will do exactly what she likes, and never will take anybody's advice, and her poor dear mother would not either! So you and I had better go without her, and then there will be room for Snipkins, and my hand-bag, and my brown shawl, on the same seat with your ankle, Catherine, in the close carriage; and I am always so afraid of Snipkins getting a sunstroke in the dickey."

Mrs Stewart only said, "Ah! exactly," and let Aunt Jane talk on. My uncle was now reading a blue-buggle, so it did not much matter what my aunt said.

On attempting to get up from table, Mrs Stewart uttered a startling scream. Aunt Jane flew to her

assistance. Poor dear Catherine's ankle was not so well as usual! Poor dear Catherine believed she had just given the foot a twist! Catherine lay on the sofa for the whole of that day, and for the next, and for a week afterwards.

The visit to Mineham was out of the question.

Mrs Stewart tried hard to get an invitation to Sherbrook Hall for Lady Arabella and Mr David Scott. Aunt Jane made no objection because Snipkins made none, but Uncle Sherbrook proved quite unmanageable! Mrs Stewart was very angry,—not that she dared show her anger to him! I heard her say to Aunt Jane, bitterly rasping her voice—"Mr Sherbrook has got some ridiculous idea in his head. I see it plainly." But she did not say what the idea was. "Mrs Sherbrook," she continued, intensifying the bitterness of the rasp—"Mrs Sherbrook, Sophy is the only person in this house who can and will rule her uncle."

It is not necessary to repeat all Aunt Jane said when thus excited to jealousy. She was huffy with me for days afterwards. If you are in good spirits, huffy people are depressing; but if your heart be sad and heavy, they drive you to despair. They are the most dreadful people to be with in sorrow, for you feel in their presence as if life never could be anything but a senseless, hopeless misery. I was wretched; and the one thought I fain would avoid, haunted me more cruelly than ever.

I could not endure the idea of meeting David Scott in Mrs Stewart's presence. I saw she was determined

we should meet under her piercing eye, and instinct told me that she wanted to see me reveal my own secret to her sight, and that she would make me do so. I was sure of it. She would cheerfully enjoy the agony of my heart, thought I. I saw myself betray my secret to this woman's horrid eye; and, worst of all, I betrayed it in her presence to David Scott. I saw the scene. No effort could prevent me from seeing it.

Mrs Stewart looked as if she had some intrigue on hand, for her uneasy eyes took no rest. This was always a bad sign of her. When Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was not tatting, she winked till you felt your own eyes winking. When she tatted, she tatted furiously, and winked less. I wondered what she could be intriguing about — if it were about the Duchess of Wildfire? or the Cossacks? or about me? I began to suspect it really was me, she knotted so irritably into her tatting. My suspicions once roused, I grew more and more certain of the fact.

At length one day Mrs Stewart came down to luncheon gorgeously attired in her best black silk — a magnificent affair, all jet and lace! She was a miser, and never wore a good dress without a good reason. So the signs of the times were unmistakable! I knew she expected visitors, and I could not but guess who they must be. Mrs Stewart invariably put on her best dress for Lady Arabella; for her ladyship was not like Aunt Jane, who considered piety and pokey dowdiness a dogma one and indivisible.

I kept my own counsel, made no remark, and seemed to notice nothing; but I just watched my opportunity, and when Mrs Stewart's back was turned, I slipped from the room unobserved, and escaped from the house by one of the open windows, without even a hat on my head.

I ran on by the garden-gate down into the glen, and then turning to the left, I took refuge in Aunt Jane's crockery-rockery summer-house—a damp place my aunt never went to now, and where, I was well aware, no one would think of looking for me. I knew Mrs Stewart would imagine I had fled to the path over the hill.

I thought nothing in this world could have made me stay to meet David Scott. Terror-stricken, I shunned him, though I longed, I craved to see him. I had been so miserable since the day I first knew I loved him, that my spirit was broken, and I felt I had not self-command to play a part.

I had feared with a great fear to hear his voice. This fear, more than any other, had made me run away from the chance of meeting him.

As I sat alone in the summer-house, I thought how strangely his voice ever moved me. I heard the sound of carriage-wheels, and realised he must be very near me now—just in the house close by. Thus thinking, my imagination seemed to feel his presence; and it heard his voice—that voice I dreaded to hear, and from which I had fled like a craven coward! And yet I heard it again, and it overcame me with strong

delusion. The absorbing thought took possession of me. I had not strength to fight against it any more.

I remembered the day I had seen David Scott rise from the land of my pleasant dreams, and I lived in his presence again. The old feeling of sympathy and ease returned to my heart; the pleasant companion was beside me once more, and I dreamt a happy dream.

Like all dreamers, I grew to forget my waking fears. Little by little the spell of illusion took such powerful hold upon me, that even my horror of meeting David Scott in Mrs Stewart's sight became effaced from my mind. Incredible as this may appear, the fact was so. But nothing seems strange to the dreamer! change is no change to him!

The spell was still upon me when at last I left the summer-house and walked towards home. I had noticed the lengthening shadows on the lawn. I went dreaming along by the path through the laurel-grove, and then on by the garden-wall.

As I drew nearer the house, I quickened my steps, for the hope of meeting David Scott had seized my heart like sudden passion. It may be, thought I, that I am not yet too late!

But I was too late. I knew it the instant I saw Mrs Stewart—she was dressed in her old gown. She lay in the open air on a sofa outside the Corinthian porch. She was alone. "Sophy," cried she, starting up, "come here! quite near to me! I have something to tell you—something you will be glad to hear."

I did as she bid me, although I trembled when I

drew near her, for her cruel voice filled me with a vague terror. I feared I knew not what.

The admirable Catherine fixed her eye upon me and smiled a nasty, little, bitter smile. Before speaking, she settled herself comfortably, and leant her elbow on a cushion, and her cheek upon her hand. "Sophy," she said, piercing her hard words into my brain, "David Scott came here this afternoon to bid us and you good-bye. He leaves Mineham early, very early, to-morrow morning. He waited for you until he could wait no more. You did not wish to see him. I know you did not! And you would not come. So now I give you joy, as you have missed the chance for ever."

"For ever!" I said, seizing her arm and wrenching her hand from her cold, unblushing cheek; "you lie, Mrs Stewart!—you lie!"

The smile lurked still in the tightened corners of her mouth. She loosened her arm from my grasp, and said—"Not quite so hard a grip, Sophy, if you please." With undisturbed composure, she continued—"And so I lie, do I indeed! and you imagine I believe David Scott never spoke to you of his affairs? From my experience of him, I consider that to be the subject on which he can talk, and . . . the only one! But perhaps you fancy, Sophy, I think you never even met him in the wood?"

I turned from the woman and felt I hated her.

"Tell me I lie, my dear!" she cried; "say it again, and as politely as before. Tell me you never walked

over the hill to meet him! Tell me you never met David Scott at all! and say he never told you that his career being ruined and gone in this country, he intended to seek another in the colonies! Never, Sophy, I am sure of it—never!"

"What do you mean?" I asked; "you mean something cruel, for I hear it in your voice. Have pity!" I cried—"have pity, Mrs Stewart, and tell me quickly!" I could say no more, for a fear greater than any I had yet known overwhelmed me. I stood before the woman imploring her mercy, with clasped hands; and she seemed to take pleasure in my misery, and to prolong it purposely.

At last she said, slowly accentuating her words, and cutting them like knives into my heart—"David Scott leaves Mineham at five to-morrow morning, and sails from Sheerness towards evening. He is bound for New Zealand."

My lips were parted, but could frame no word.

"For New Zealand," repeated Mrs Stewart; "it is a long way off, Sophy! And he came to say a last good-bye, yet you would not even see him."

I could breathe no sound, not even a cry of sorrow. I stood speechless, like one struck dead by lightning in the very midst of life. I was only conscious of one thought, one anguish—he came to say a last good-bye, and I would not even see him!

CHAPTER XIX.

When after long blindness our eyes are first opened, it is by the clearness of things quite near to us, and yet hitherto unperceived, that we realise how painfully intense the dimness of our vision has been. There is no deadness of sight, thought I, like the densely veiled eye of self-consciousness, for this is a blindness which does not strive to see: engrossed in self-gazing, it does not look abroad, and so is blind without knowing it.

When I believed David Scott to be gone for ever, scales seemed to fall from my eyes, and I saw standing out right before me, with painful clearness, what had been hidden from my sight till now. I saw how entirely my own selfish thoughts and fears had preoccupied my mind, engrossing its imagination, which is its sympathy. I saw all this so clearly, that I wondered indignantly I had not seen it before. That day when David Scott named the hour I should meet him on the hill, I doubt not, thought I, but he meant to tell me how the one career he longed after in this country had become a lost hope to him, and how dis-

appointment and despair were driving him to a distant land. Away, far away, beyond the seas! I knew how he hated the idea of the colonies, and how he loved the career he had lost. I remembered how eloquently he had spoken of the time when his ambition and his hopes were roused. I could hear his words again.

He came to me, thought I, hoping for the sympathy he could not find elsewhere, and I hid away from him and gave him none! Yet the first word of sympathy which fell upon the loneliness of my own life came from his kind lips.

I saw that, seized by the shy panic of a selfish passion, I had forgotten to be a friend to him, and had only remembered to befriend myself. I grieved over the painful sight. I would fain have been blinded once more, since he was gone from me for ever, and remorse could not bring him back again. But remorse will bear no bandage on her eye: her sting is in that eye, which sleeps neither by day nor by night, but sees with cruel clearness what we never thought to see. I was forced to look at my unsympathising selfishness, and I shrank from the sight in vain. I now saw my conduct as it really was, and I could no longer understand my one-sided preoccupation. So passionately did I crave to recall the past, that the new feeling drove away the old ones, and I could not even grasp them, much less understand them: they had flown like birds that spread their wings and leave no trace of their flight in the air.

I grew insensible to the admirable Catherine's eye,

and I forgot to fear Aunt Jane. When in real sorrow, we think only of our grief. "He is gone, and I shall not see him again! He is gone, and without one kind word from me! gone as a stranger would go!" This sorrow ached in my heart.

I did not care to guard my secret now—indeed I remembered it no more. I said openly that I must be alone—that I could not bear to talk and be talked to. Aunt Jane exclaimed loudly, as if I were mad, at hearing me speak thus; but Mrs Stewart had compassion on me, and managed to take my aunt and uncle off driving to Votlingham.

In our deepest sorrow, there is a strange, irresistible attraction to the scene of our greatest joy. Perhaps without our knowing it, we hope our joy may yet be breathing there—perhaps we fancy it only sleeps, and we hope to awake it. This feeling is like the one which brings us back again to gaze upon the dead, and to see with our own eyes if the fearful stillness has not moved.

It was thus, once more to gaze upon the joy which lay dead, that I walked, when left alone, on the path over the hill.

I stopped where David Scott and I had stopped that day to hear the cuckoo; but the voice was silent in the wood.

No violet bloomed upon the bank where I had sat, and I looked and I longed, but David did not stand where he had stood before. The scene was changed, and all its brightness gone! I had come to see and

feel if maybe the joy of spring breathed still in the summer air, or throbbed in the full beauty of the harvest-laden land, or whispered in the far-off voices, or moved amongst the trees. But I found no breath, nor pulse of joy; and when I cast myself upon the scentless bank, it was beside the dead I lay. I felt there was no hope of returning life to that dead joy,—dead it was, never to rise again!

The parting from joy and him I loved had not one hope in it. Where I had heard that thrilling voice, it now was silent, and I knew would never strike my heart again. I felt David Scott was dead to me for ever and for ever; and yet my love still lived to know there was no hope.

The sorrow of this thought benumbed me, as sorrow will; and though I raised myself and looked towards the distant hills, I saw nothing in the view before me but the dead joy of a bygone day. I was blind to all else, and deaf to every sound.

. . . . . .

At last, with a great effort, I rose to leave. Why should I sit gazing for ever upon a sorrow in which there was no hope?

I turned to go, but started back in sudden, astounded dread. I seemed to see David Scott looking at me with the eager glance I knew so well, and he seemed to lean upon the gate close by, just as he had leant that day over the lost joy of which I mourned.

I passed my hand across my eyes to wipe away the mocking vision, yet found I had not dimmed its start-

ling vividness. Stricken with terror, I stared, and could not understand, when lo! the voice I never thought to hear again, vibrated through my soul.

The rapture of that sound stilled all life and thought within me. I stood like some cold statue whose ears and heart are made of stone.

David drew near, quite near to me, and spoke kind words, softly soothing my dumb terror. He took my hand and held it in his warm grasp. It was he indeed! I saw the living fire of his eye, and suddenly I remembered the secret which I should hide from him. I felt that to his eye my love was written in my face; so I turned away my head, shading my face with the hand that was free.

I heard him implore me to speak. I could not speak! He asked why I had so long avoided him? why I had not walked on this path that day two months ago, when I knew that I should meet him? He asked why I had grown deaf and blind, so that I neither heard nor saw him coming through the wood? And then he asked what sorrow was this which appeared to fill my whole heart, making me look so changed and sad? He paused for an answer; yet I spoke not. I trembled so that I could hardly stand, but gave no other sign of life.

He did not quickly speak again. A throbbing silence seemed to fall between us.

At length he spoke once more. And now I thought that I was mad indeed! And I wrenched my hand from his, fearing some cruel, mocking spirit of my own

imagination had taken David's shape, and was speaking words of rapture to me, whose illusion I should wake from to find they were unreal—words that David Scott never, never would say to me!

I could not, I dared not, believe what I seemed to hear. But I heard those same words again. I raised my head, and gazed at David with unshrouded eyes, and I saw him look kindly at me, and then I heard him say, "How often must I tell you of my love? Can you not believe in love, or in my words? Listen, listen, and again I will tell you that I love you!"

He loved me! I had then heard aright? It was then true he loved me? He could then find it in his heart to love me? Oh agony of joy!

I fell upon my knees at David's feet, and sobbing, cried, "You have killed me, you have killed me with joy!"

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

Or third?

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